TOBEY'S FIRST CASE

Clara Louise Burnham

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TOBEY'S FIRST CASE

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A NOVEL

BY

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM

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TO
M. S. C.

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TOBEY'S FIRST CASE

CHAPTER I

THE CUB REPORTER

THE editor-in-chief of the *Evening Telegram* laughed softly to himself as he looked toward the door of his sanctum which had just been closed softly and with care.

'Poor little Tobey, she's tremendously in earnest,' he mused. 'Too pretty to last, though. Some man will snatch her out of a newspaper office before she is twenty. Looks more like her mother every day — not so good-looking, though.'

Robert Bennett's eyes fixed musingly on the full-length photograph of a woman on his desk. It was not the only one there, nor was it placed in the most conspicuous position. He was a happy family man and the faces of his wife and daughter also looked down upon him; but Tobey had given him this picture of

her mother, at his request, after the latter's death, and he treasured it.

The tremendously-in-earnest look that had amused him was still in the girl's eyes as she hurried through the labyrinth of corridor that led to the stairs and the street.

At the head of the flight a man running up accosted her, his eyes noting the concentration of the face under the short crop of dark hair.

'Hello, Baby.'

'Good-morning, Mr. Gaynes,' she returned with dignity, and tried to pass him.

'None o' that,' he said with rough good humor, catching her by the arm. 'You can't be a successful reporter, you know, unless you're a regular fellow. Society girl airs won't get you anywhere.'

She pulled away from his grasp, but stood still. She wished to be on good terms with all the men in the office, but this one's familiarities, based ostensibly on her youth, had made him odious before this. The color in her cheeks glowed, but she controlled herself.

'Are you a reporter, Tobey,' he added

teasingly, while he stared down appreciatively at the sparkling dark eyes, and rosy, curved, kissable mouth, 'or a special writer?' She irritated him chiefly because his patronage of her had never been well received, and also he resented her situation on the paper as interfering at times with his own work in the lighter vein, which he followed when serious matters were not pending. He considered her superfluous, and unless she was grateful for his indulgent attentions she was a total loss so far as he was concerned. The trouble was she was too attractive to be ignored. She irritated him.

'Why do you ask that?' she inquired, trying to smile. 'You seem to forget that my name is Miss Rebecca Tobias Vincent, and reporters are not addressed as "Baby."'

'Except when they look like you,' returned Gaynes, laughing. 'You're an awful temptation, Miss Rebecca Tobias Vincent. I always hear the Chief call you "Tobey." You like that better than "Baby"? How about a cub reporter? You're a cub, aren't you?'

'Yes, I suppose I still am,' said the girl

with such evident satisfaction in the business-like-sounding term that Gaynes laughed again.

'Excuse me, I must go. I'm in a hurry,' she continued, glancing up at the burly form barring her way, longing to push him aside, and not wanting to touch him.

'What's on? Got a scoop?' teased the man. 'Has to be written up right away quick? Skirts going to be worn longer — or some new way to fix tomatoes and olives, or —'

Her lithe body slid by him with such suddenness that when he turned she was halfway down the stair.

'Acts as if she had something up her sleeve,' he muttered, glancing after her discontentedly.

Indeed, sleeves were on Tobey's mind at this moment. They were hard to iron, and her white silk blouse was washed and ready. She glowed with anticipation, for she had been given an assignment which would bring that blouse into play. She must look spick and span when she talked to the great man. Mrs. Caraway, the landlady of her second-floor

back, was very kind about letting her use the electric iron. It helped out wonderfully.

The house where Mrs. Caraway received paying guests was highly respectable and somewhat pretentious. It had as page boy the blackest of little darkies in a uniform of plum color, green braid and brass buttons, with a stiff round cap worn so rakishly that the circumstance of his having two ears was all that retained it on his close-cropped wool. He was so polished and shiny black that Tobey once called him 'Anthracite,' and this name so engaged him that his ivories glistened and he adored the girl boarder from that day. It was the grandest-sounding name he had ever heard and so superior to Abel, with which his parents had tagged him, as not to be mentioned the same day.

Anthracite he was, and now, as Tobey approached the house, she saw him, eyes rolling and staring, brass buttons glistening, but no display of ivories. He was running at top speed down the street to meet her.

'She mons'ous pow'ful, Miss Tobey,' he panted as he drew near her, 'an' she would have it.'

'Have what? Do catch your breath, Anthracite, and don't lose your eyes out.'

'Yo' key. Key to yo' room. Mis' Car'way she gone out, an' she say she kin to you.'

'Who? Some woman came and got my key?' Tobey shook the small agitated green shoulder. 'You shouldn't have given my key to any one. You know that.'

'Ain't nothin' I know better, but she mons'ous pow'ful and she say she kin to you.'

'Is she up there now?' Tobey began to hurry, the rakish cap bobbing along beside her. 'Who is it, quick? What's her name?'

'Sally.' The whites of Anthracite's eyes rolled up at his adored one. 'I 'membered it easy 'cause it my mom's name.'

'Sally who?'

'Not any who. Jes' Sally.'

'Oh, you little goose!' ejaculated Tobey as she raced along. 'You did very wrong, Anthracite. You know you shouldn't give my key to a stranger.'

The little darky's eyes squeezed shut in his earnestness. 'She not no stranger, she kin to

you, an' she mons'ous pow'ful. Hope to die.'

They had reached the house and were hurrying up the steps when an idea flashed upon Tobey. It was an appalling idea. She stood still and gazed down upon the diminutive sufferer in the smart suit.

'Is the lady tall, Anthracite?'

'Ya-yas'm.'

'Is she thin?'

'Ya-yas'm.'

'Has she a long nose?'

'Ya-yas'm.' Anthracite thought he saw light breaking through the clouds because his adored one had ceased scowling at him and was looking thoughtful.

'Yas'm, long nose,' he responded eagerly; 'somep'n like a hoss, Miss, and she tu'n her haid so, an' look over her shoulder this-away' — the speaker lowered his head and turned it slowly, looking backward. 'Jes' like a hoss, Miss. Hope to die.'

There was no mistaking it now. Tobey could see the long upper lip and the inquiring turn of the head. She dropped on the stone

step and gave way to emotion. Anthracite's eyes bulged; he thought he had broken his adored one's heart.

'Oh, what a thing to happen! Oh, I can't have her now!' Tobey wiped her eyes and, to Anthracite's infinite relief, he saw that she was laughing. His spirits shot high. He believed his mimicry had brought about this amazing and joyous dénouement.

'Like a hoss. Hope to die,' he gurgled with the widest grin in his repertoire.

'Hush, hush, Anthracite. She's a very nice lady.'

'Yas'm,' returned the relieved child without conviction.

Tobey rose, the little page opened the door, and she started upstairs with reluctant feet and busy thoughts. 'Oh, these angelic mothers! What a burden of virtues are visited upon their children. I know what Mother would say. She'd tell me to welcome her and make her have a good time. *She* always did. Well, I'm in for it, but I've got to iron that waist. I wonder if I'll have to ask her to stay to lunch?'

This question was answered very definitely when the girl opened her door and her visitor was revealed sitting in the armchair by the window. Her wraps were off and she had a most permanent air.

'Well, Tobey Vincent,' she greeted her, rising, coming forward and kissing the offered pink cheek. 'Were you ever more surprised?' She laughed happily. 'Here I am in possession, and I'll bet when you went out this morning you never thought of such a thing, now, did you?' Under the long nose the smile was triumphant.

'No, never, Cousin Ann Sally. How is everybody in Centerville?'

'Oh, all right, I guess,' returned the other scornfully. 'I'm sick of the sight of all of them, and when I realized that I must have a change or else dry up and blow away, why, I thought there's poor little Tobey Vincent. I haven't seen her since Cousin Rebecca's funeral, more than a year ago, and I'm just going up to town and mother her for a while. It'll do me as much good as it will her.' She paused and gazed down at Tobey with a

smile of such satisfaction that the girl, being the child of her mother's training, smiled back civilly and said it was very kind of her.

'I liked the looks of the house as soon as I came into it,' she continued. 'The landlady was out, but I made that little black imp in the brass buttons show me around and I'm going to take the room right in front of yours, so I can look after you night and day.'

'Dear Cousin Ann Sally,' Tobey was aghast, 'you must get rid of that idea at once. I don't need any looking after.'

'Yes, that's what all the young things of to-day think.' Cousin Ann Sally tossed her head, and Tobey thought irresistibly of Anthracite's simile and could almost hear the harness jingle. 'But girls of nineteen do need mothering and you ain't any older than that.'

'Well, sit down, Cousin Ann Sally. You were there by the window when I came in.' The visitor accepted the chair again.

'Real sightly it is for a city window,' she said, looking out.

'Yes, I'm lucky in my view. You see, I'm just around the corner from that handsome

place backing on the big garden and I have the benefit of the garden all the time.'

'It's grand,' agreed the other. She again cast her regard on the luxuriant hedges of sweet peas, the carefully laid-out beds of pansies and geraniums, with their borders of sweet alyssum, the fountain and pool for a bird bath, the pergola shady with vines, then she turned and looked curiously at the young girl, who had seated herself in the other chair. Tobey was wondering if it would do to admit tacitly the other's right to be there by so intimate an act as getting out the damp blouse on which her heart was fixed.

'Now, tell me, Tobey,' said the visitor with relish.

'Tell you what?'

'Everything. All about it. I feel to blame myself that I haven't been to town before in all this time since your mother died. You know well enough she had enough friends in Centerville if you needed anything. Folks said that no sooner was she laid away in her old home town than you disappeared. Some were kind o' hurt. I knew your mother had

been on the paper, the *Telegram*. Of course' — Cousin Ann Sally smiled significantly — 'if she was going to be on any paper, it would be Bob Bennett's.'

'He was very kind to her,' said Tobey gravely.

'I should say so.' The response was brisk and matter-of-fact. 'They were boy and girl together, and it was well known he was dying to be your father.'

Tobey blushed. 'How awful a small town is!' she exclaimed with distaste, which did not at all abash her companion, who continued cheerfully.

'Well, I guess that's what Bob Bennett thought. He didn't give up till your mother got engaged to young Vincent, then he lit out for the city, and I'm sure when your father shared the inventor's fate and didn't get much for his pains, and finally passed away, Bennett was a real good friend to your mother.'

Tobey's cheeks were flushed. 'My mother was a very clever writer,' she said, stirring under the piercing, curious gaze.

'She was a lovely thing, and she was fond

of me' — the tone grew complacent. 'Such a welcome as Cousin Rebecca always gave me when I came to see her! Well' — the reminiscent tone again took on its brisk, searching quality — 'did she leave you enough to live on, child? The weeks come 'round awful regular when you're paying board.'

It was of no use to resent Cousin Ann Sally, and equally hopeless to escape her unless one adopted heroic measures, and that 'lovely thing' who had been Rebecca Vincent had set an example.

'I'm on the paper,' replied Tobey.

'You don't say so! I thought perhaps you had a kindergarten or something.'

'No, I'm on the paper,' repeated Tobey.

'A reporter?' ejaculated the other. 'A good thing I came. A child like you!'

'Uncle Bob took me on for Mother's sake, and I'm bound to succeed.' The girl's eyes grew as bright again as they were when she left the editor's office.

'Well, it's certainly a good thing I'm here.' Cousin Ann Sally gave a sort of snort, sitting up very straight in her chair, lowered her chin

and tossed her head until again Tobey bit her lip, sensing a jingle. 'If you're called to a fire in the night, you just knock on the wall and I'll be with you in no time. I've always felt it in me to be a good reporter.'

'I believe you would have been,' agreed Tobey, regarding the alert gray head, her dimple recalling what her mother used to say, that Cousin Ann Sally had the physique of a greyhound but the scent of a bloodhound. Her nose was to the ground, as well as her ear, and no happening in the village was small enough to be able to hide where Cousin Ann Sally could not track it to its lair.

'To feel it in you to do things in the world and then have to drowse and snore your life away in a place like Centerville is just torture, Tobey Vincent. I couldn't leave as long as Ma lived, and, bless her heart, she held on till she was ninety; but now I'm here'—she looked at the girl with an excited gleam in her eye—'and you're a reporter, and no knowing but I can help you a lot.'

Tobey felt a sudden panic. Cousin Ann Sally looked at her so thirstily.

'I'm afraid I can't entertain you at all, I'm so busy,' said the girl defensively. 'I hope you know the town well enough to be happy to go about by yourself and have a good time.'

'A good time! Don't you worry. It's a good time to see new houses and streets and people; besides, it's you I'm thinking about. I'm going to see to you.'

Tobey stifled a groan.

'We had one family in Centerville who came here years ago that I am curious about. I wouldn't call or anything like that, because they've made so much money I suppose they look down on anybody that hasn't, though, if you ask *me*, I'd rather beg from door to door than make money the way some folks do. My middle name is Integrity if I do say it.'

Tobey listened, the white blouse pulling at her heartstrings, it might get too dry, and her eyes roving to the busy-bee clock on her desk. All at once the visitor unconsciously proceeded to secure her attention.

'It isn't as if I didn't know Em Battle well enough to call if I wanted to, but I ain't one

ever to push in, and I'd as lieve see the old boy as Douglas Adair!'

Tobey's eyes leaped from the alarm-clock to her visitor's face.

'You mean the Adairs.'

'Yes. He lost his wife, so his sister, Mrs. Battle, came to keep house for him and bring up the boys and their older sister, who was the daughter of his first. Elizabeth married and went away soon after her aunt came, and I'll bet she was glad to get away from old Crusty. There ain't many folks I'm afraid of, but, by ginks, Douglas Adair always was the bogey man to me. I don't know why I should want to follow 'em up, but folks you've known as poor are kind of interestin' when they strike oil.'

'Was it oil?' Tobey left her chair and approached the visitor, her face displaying such close attention that Miss Sally regarded her questioningly.

'No, 'twa'n't oil, but it might as well have been. I ain't one to pass on gossip, but that invention that Douglas Adair got hold of wasn't ever the product of his brain, folks say.

'No, 'twa'n't your pa's invention. Another man altogether; but you can just see how you'd feel if it had been your pa's and he done out of it.'

'That's their place.' Tobey indicated the mass of flowers and greenery below.

'That? That Em Battle's garden?' Miss Sally stared down again at the fountain sparkling in the June sunshine, its bowl a magnet for the birds; with renewed interest she marked the marble garden seats encircling it, the carefully kept order and charm of flowers and shrubs and the hedges of sweet peas.

'That Em Battle's garden,' she repeated thoughtfully. 'Well, there's one happy woman in this town. I never knew anyone to care for flowers as much as Mrs. Battle did. She used to live and breathe 'em. Now she's got her heart's desire.' The speaker looked up at Tobey. 'Are you acquainted with them? You ought to be. She must have known your mother years ago. I'm not sure, though. She came to Centerville a stranger.'

'I scarcely think she knew my mother. I didn't know the Adairs came from Centerville.'

'Yes; but while the boys were still young they left. Do you know them?' The repeated question came eagerly.

Tobey smiled and lifted her shoulders. 'A scraped acquaintance,' she said. 'I stopped so often to look through the fence at the flowers that I came to be on speaking terms with the gardener, and one day Mrs. Battle talked with me. She seemed pleased at my interest and asked me to come in any time and help myself to the sweet peas; but I never did.'

No, Tobey couldn't quite do that under the circumstances.

Some one has said, apropos of affairs of the heart, that a man first finds his beloved and then prepares a niche for her, but that a woman's niche is always ready so that when she selects her idol, no time is lost in placing him. Tobey Vincent's heart had acclaimed hers. He was a rich man's son, a favorite in his class at college by reason of a generous disposition, a contempt of meanness, and an ability to play every musical instrument ever made. She was as likely to be sought by

him as by the Prince of Wales, and she knew it, but the fact did not deter her at all. She felt that in choosing Colin Adair she had followed her mother's oft-repeated mandate to hitch her wagon to a star; and although he had more than once, when he was walking with another man and talking busily, been capable of not recognizing and returning her bow, but passing in ignorance of it, that circumstance had no effect upon her beyond producing a blush, permanent for perhaps an hour. What was one flapper more or less to Colin Adair who knew dozens? She loved his deeply interested, vital preoccupations, and the way he chatted and laughed with people. There was never a cloud on his brow. The joy of living was in his walk and in every gesture.

How she blessed her music-loving mother, who never wanted to spend their slender recreation-money for the theater, but was always taking her little girl to concerts! Colin Adair's chief interest in life was music. She had been able to speak to him with some intelligence on the few occasions when she had met him under Mrs. Bennett's wing. That

lady had money in her own right and was a patron of the arts, so she took an interest in the young composer aside from his social value; and she had taken Tobey with her to a few receptions where they had met him. Indeed, the night before Cousin Ann Sally dawned on Tobey, Mrs. Bennett had given a musicale herself where Colin Adair was the star.

Miss Sally continued to look up with eager interest.

'Do you know the boys?' she asked.

'I've met them.'

'There used to be two of 'em, Duncan and Colin. I suppose they're both alive and kicking.'

'Yes; the younger, Colin, is a musician. I attended a musicale last evening at the Bennetts' where his compositions were on the programme. He sings them beautifully himself.'

Miss Sally looked with heightened curiosity at the speaker. The girl's eyes and cheeks were glowing.

'H'm. Fell in love with him, did you?'

Tobey laughed. 'The idea of a newspaper

woman falling in love!' Her thoughts were in a riot. A scene at the piano last evening rose before her. Colin Adair had just finished singing his setting of a German poem. It was so lovely that she lost all self-consciousness for the time and expressed warmly her joy in both voice and song. The musician seemed very young to her at the moment and he was evidently lifted above all things sublunary. Others flocked about him, and Tobey, dropping her handkerchief, he stooped and picked it up mechanically, and as he turned to meet another admiring onslaught, he unconsciously stuffed the handkerchief into his own pocket.

Tobey smiled now at the remembrance.

'Oh, well, I guess newspaper women are human,' remarked Miss Sally dryly, 'but you take a tip from me and don't try to be an in-law to Douglas Adair. Keep right off the grass, Tobey Vincent.'

'You frighten me, Cousin Ann Sally.' Tobey regarded her with far more lenient eyes than hitherto. 'Uncle Bob has just given me an assignment to interview Mr. Adair for an article on his life.'

'Well, 'tain't worth laying down your own for and leaving your bones to bleach in his cave.'

'Oh, now, don't scare me. Encourage me; and, Cousin Ann Sally, I have to iron a white silk blouse and I must do it right off.'

'Give it here. I'll do it for you.' The visitor rose. 'Bring on your board and things. I guess there's time before dinner.'

'It's lunch, and I couldn't think of troubling you.'

'Oh, yes, I suppose you think you'd do it better than I will,' said the other good-humoredly, 'but you're all off.'

Tobey laughed and moved to the spot where was the precious damp roll.

'Why, how slangy you are!' she said.

'It's the only thing that kept me alive in Centerville. It was the only improper thing I could find to do. You sit right down here while I iron, and tell me about the Adair boys. They were a handful when Em Battle took 'em. I'd like to know how they turned out.'

CHAPTER II

BY FAIR MEANS OR FOUL

TOBEY heated the iron and for a minute kept a jealous eye on the handling of the white blouse.

'Oh, you needn't watch me,' said Cousin Ann Sally. 'I'm a regular Trilby when it comes to ironing. Go ahead with your news. Let's see what kind of a reporter you are.'

Tobey sank into a chair from which she could watch the delicate matter of the sleeves. 'I'll tell you what kind of a reporter I'd like to be,' she said wistfully. 'I want the criminal cases and Jim Gaynes has got them.'

Miss Sally glanced down at the alive, longing little face and laughed. 'It'll be a long step toward it if you interview Douglas Adair — you baby.'

'Not such a baby as you think.' Tobey rose and took a flat thin book from her dresser. 'I keep a scrapbook of all the

interesting clippings I find on the subject of crime. I liked mathematics at school. I like hard ones, and I believe I'd be as good as that big, clumsy Jim Gaynes any day if Uncle Bob would give me a chance.'

She read aloud a few of her clippings while Cousin Ann Sally ironed. 'There, you see, she said, looking up, 'it's lots of fun to plan what I'd do in cases like that. I'm watching and I'm going to wait for a chance, but Jim Gaynes would be furious, I suppose, if I peeped.'

'More amused than mad, I guess,' remarked Miss Sally, still laughing to herself over the incongruity between Tobey and her ambition.

She was keenly interested in thus finding a link with the Adair family. She had watched the rise of the hard-headed Scotchman in the newspapers. Such a forbidding man *should* be in the hardware business. She always thought it most appropriate when, years ago, he had the chief store in Centerville. He had attracted while he repelled her; and she always wondered how he must have carried himself, how talked, how behaved,

and how that dark brow must have softened when he went courting, both the first and second time; but her only acquaintance with him had been over the counter and she could only guess at these things.

When his sister came to take charge of his family, Miss Sally had called, but Mrs. Battle had not seemed inclined to be social outside her own domain; getting Elizabeth ready to be married, and dealing with the two little half-brothers. Centerville liked Mrs. Battle, simple, strong, unaffected, and, although they could never get nearer to her than her flower garden, they forgave the hard-working housekeeper.

The ironing went on deftly and Miss Sally returned to her subject.

'You say you have met the Adair boys. Tell me about them. They sure were little scamps when Em Battle took 'em.'

Tobey leaned her head back in her chair. 'Oh, they're very prominent socially now.'

'Well, do they know anything?'

'The older, Duncan, went to college only one year. He was eager for business.'

Miss Sally poised the iron on its stand and regarded her informer impressively. 'Did he make a hit with his father? I'll say he did!'

'Yes, I've heard that Mr. Adair was much pleased. You know people talk about them a lot. The other one, Colin, went through his four years and graduated last June.'

'I suppose Douglas Adair is an old lion. You've met him?'

Tobey's kissable mouth widened into the prettiest smile in town. 'No, I haven't met him, but I often see his car come out of the garage in the morning, and see him get into it.' She nodded significantly. 'You ask me to-morrow noon.'

'You're bound to tackle him, are you, without a cent's worth of life insurance?'

'He sits on the veranda in the morning and reads his paper. See that veranda that extends across the back of the house, 'way to the *porte-cochère?*'

Miss Sally stretched her neck until she glimpsed it from the window.

'Old nabob,' she muttered; 'I can see him sitting there reading his paper.'

'Yes, the weather has been heavenly all this June. I don't wonder they go away late when they go.'

'And here you live right around the corner and have only just met them. They don't know a pretty girl when they see one! Are they bright boys? Society men don't mean anything. Come, now, let's see what sort of reporter you are. Let's hear your language. Suppose you were writing up Duncan Adair.'

Tobey lifted her chin and began: 'Our brilliant young townsman, Duncan Adair, who might so easily be a social light and leader of the younger set, is already a man of affairs, giving promise of ably succeeding his father, so prominent in the world of finance. His is an old head on young shoulders —'

'What does he look like?' — interruption from the ironing-table.

'He's dark and very good-looking,' said Tobey, dropping her oratorical tone; 'rather stocky, not like his tall, slender brother.'

'And now the brother.' Miss Sally glanced at the girl. 'More language, please.'

Tobey did not meet her cousin's eye. She

closed the scrapbook and embraced it, leaning back and crossing her knees.

'Oh, I didn't tell you that Mr. Adair let Colin have a vacation last summer, but he is a talented musician and his father — this is what people say — was afraid he would get too deep into music, so he sent him to South America to take charge of the business there, and he wasn't here last winter at all. He has been back only a few weeks.'

'Well, go on, report him. I can see Duncan very well; a chip of the old block.' Miss Sally held the blouse up by the shoulders and looked at it intently. 'More language, please. He's handsome, I suppose?'

Tobey did not meet her guest's eye.

'No,' she said, as if she were thinking, 'Colin doesn't need to be handsome. He has such a strong — sweet — sensitive — attractiveness.'

'Language,' murmured Cousin Ann Sally, laying the blouse down.

'There is heart in his face; soul; intelligence,' went on Tobey slowly; 'firmness of will; sympathy and humor.' The slow enu-

meration paused, and then continued, 'These all blend together for charm, and sound in his beautiful voice.'

Cousin Ann Sally straightened to her full height and gave a shrewd glance at the rapt face, in the following pause.

'What price that article?' she asked at last.

'Free for all,' said Tobey, sitting up and putting down the scrapbook.

'Are you well acquainted with him? I'd like to hear him sketch you.'

The girl smiled. 'He couldn't sketch me. "The moon looks on many brooks. The brook sees but one moon." I've met him a few times, but I'm not sure he's met me. Last evening at Uncle Bob's was the nearest to it. We really talked a little. He is entirely wrapped up in his music, and one of the festivities of the college commencement last year was the production of a musical play he had written. Uncle Bob sent me to Berwick to cover it. Colin took the leading part.' The girl shook her head with a sigh.

'That sigh came clear from your buckles, Tobey.'

'Well, he wore a white uniform, and the way he made love to the fellow who was the heroine!'

'What?'

'Yes, the boys did it all, and that Dick Evans was the most striking girl I ever saw.'

Miss Sally looked interested. 'I suppose Em Battle was there. Somehow I can't see Douglas Adair applauding a show like that. He must be getting human in his old age.'

Tobey shook her head. 'Well, he didn't begin to be that night. I sat near enough to watch them. I never saw such a human thundercloud. Heavy gray hair, heavy black eyebrows, black eyes, and a mouth that never lifted at the corners the whole evening, while people were applauding wildly, shouting and laughing. Poor Mrs. Battle, she seemed to be just trying to smooth him down all the time. Duncan was on her other side, gay and appreciative enough; but the father kept his hands doubled on his stick, apparently just enduring it. There was a reception after the play and the actors came out in their costumes and it was such a jolly, happy-

family-party sort of time. I heard Mrs. Battle say imploringly, "Do, Douglas, just for the speech of people," and she managed to drag him up to a refreshment table; but poor Colin! Perhaps he went through a scene later.'

Cousin Ann Sally shook her head. 'He had two parents, that boy, and I remember his mother well. Real pretty woman, and quite a musician. Folks said he wouldn't let her play the piano when he was in the house. Colin simply took after her, I suppose.'

'Yes, he must have.'

There had been several unsuccessful efforts to interview Douglas Adair for the papers, and Robert Bennett was trying the experiment of sending Tobey to see what her fresh, pretty girlishness might accomplish with the dour Scotchman. He might be wheedled into helping a young reporter who was trying her wings; so this Saturday morning, in her immaculate white costume Tobey bid Cousin Ann Sally farewell, tetering a minute on the edge of the nest like a timorous young bird.

'I'll watch from the window,' said Ann Sally.

'But you can't see where I go in,' said the girl. 'That wide back veranda, with the French windows opening out, the family use a great deal. That's where I told you he reads his paper; but I'm going around to the front entrance, of course, like somebody in particular.' They both laughed, standing by the open window, looking down on the garden, lovely in the freshness of the summer morning.

'Well, he may throw you out the back way,' suggested Cousin Ann Sally. 'I could see that.'

Tobey put both hands over her ears and fled from the room. Anthracite from his post in the hall below viewed the white vision catapulting down the flight with twinkling feet.

'Jes' like a angel, Miss Tobey,' he said, his eyes rolling. 'You look jes' like a angel fallin' out the sky. Hope to die.'

'Well, you will sometime, Anthracite. I hope everybody who sees me to-day will think I look like an angel.'

'They will, sure,' earnestly. 'Can't I ca'y somep'n for you? It's goin' to be hot, Miss Tobey.'

'Don't say that,' commanded the girl. 'Don't I look cool?'

'You does that, jes' like a —'

'And I'm going to stay so,' averred the girl stoutly to her own heart, which Cousin Ann Sally's tale had made to quake. She slid the handle of her ample handbag down from her arm into her white-gloved hand. She wished it didn't look quite so new and untried, but Uncle Bob had explained to her that he was counting on her freshness to take Mr. Adair by pleasant surprise, and coax him into a bit of biography.

She moved down the street to the corner and, turning into the fashionable avenue, proceeded to the stately entrance of the massive stone house. She noticed that the perfectly kept lawn about it was marred at one side by clayey yellow soil which workmen were digging up in order to reach a drain, and carelessly slinging over the velvet green of the clover.

'What a pity!' she thought in passing, but regard for the lawn was forgotten as she hurried along the stone walk and ascended the steps.

'I do so want to please Uncle Bob,' she thought devoutly, and rang the bell. She expected a man to open the door, but it was swung back silently and a white-capped maid appeared in the entrance.

The girl had a dignified face, with regular features and steady eyes, a face that made Tobey suddenly search her memory. Where had she seen this girl before, or whom did she resemble?

'May I see Mr. Adair?' she asked, and stepped quickly into the hall. The maid did not altogether like the celerity of the movement. It looked as if this young girl had not been sure of admittance.

'Which Mr. Adair?' The question came coldly, but in a refined tone.

'Mr. Douglas Adair.' Tobey smiled as winningly as she knew how, which was very much so. 'I know he does not go to town till later.'

'He has just gone out on the veranda. Your name, please?'

'He doesn't know me; but I have an important message for him from Mr. Bennett, Mr. Robert Bennett, and if you will let me just step out on the veranda and speak to him?' Tobey's voice and whole appearance were so charming, the maid hesitated.

'You haven't bonds, or anything to sell?'

'No, no, indeed' — this alert, white, pretty girl was sparklingly honest — 'and I won't detain him long.'

'Then come this way.' And in a minute more Tobey found herself passing into the library and out through the open French door upon the veranda.

A man was sitting there, reading his newspaper. He looked up and his black brows drew together questioningly at sight of the vision.

'Mr. Adair, may I speak to you a minute?' Tobey came forward. She wondered whether Cousin Ann Sally was watching.

Mr. Adair's shoes, resting on the veranda rail, came down, but he did not rise nor re-

move his cigar. He looked at the girl with piercing eyes and brows still drawn.

'What a beautiful place to read your paper!' she said nervously, with a glance over the still beauty of the garden and the birds flitting toward the tinkling fountain.

'Yes, I should be glad to do so,' he responded briefly.

Tobey, her head a little on the side, the kissable lips curving over her teeth in a slight smile, came a bit nearer.

'If you'll give me just a couple of minutes, Mr. Adair' — her breath came faster, but her soft voice was steady. 'I don't believe you know how interested everybody is in you.' The corners of the listener's lips came down. 'You know how helpful and encouraging it is to others to learn the experiences of successful men.'

The man's sharp eyes fell to the black satchel.

'See here,' he interrupted roughly, 'are you a reporter?'

'Is it wicked to be a reporter?' asked Tobey faintly, feeling a little hysterical at

the thought of the possibility of the watcher at the upper window, and the futility of the white blouse.

'Look here. Everybody in this town knows that I don't talk for the papers. Who sent you?'

'No matter who sent me,' returned Tobey, plucking up spirit, 'if you only want to snub him. Mr. Adair, I'm just starting in. Won't you tell me just a little bit of how you made your great success?'

'Wire and the war made my great success,' he said bitingly, 'and your paper doesn't need to inform the town of that, for everybody knows it.'

'But the steps —'

'Are nobody's business. I should like to read my paper, young lady, if you don't mind.'

Tobey's eyes flashed at him, and they could flash.

'And if it wasn't for reporters,' she announced, 'there wouldn't be anything there for you to read. You don't deserve this garden!'

Douglas Adair looked after the accusing angel as she disappeared in a white whirl through the French window, and grunted as he restored his shoes to the veranda rail.

Tobey, the erstwhile flashing eyes swimming, came blindly through the library, and, trying to exit, ran into the comfortable, plump arms of Mrs. Battle, who, at the maid's report of the visitor, was coming to investigate.

'Why, it's my little kindred spirit,' said the lady, 'and she's crying. What's the matter, my dear?' She held Tobey by the shoulders.

'I'm a report — porter,' stammered Tobey, 'and Mr. Adair won't — won't —'

'Tell me about it,' said Mrs. Battle, her lips twitching.

'Mr. Bennett of the *Telegram* — he's my editor.' Tobey strove with herself. 'I'm just beginning, and I did so want to please him and show him I could do things.'

Mrs. Battle's gray eyes joined her laughing lips. 'So he sent you to my brother? He gave you the hardest nut in town to crack? Not

quite fair, it seems to me. Now, don't you cry.'

'No, I'm stopping,' stammered Tobey. 'We wanted to get a sketch of his life.'

'Well, you wait. I remember you and your love for the flowers. We'll have a talk.' Mrs. Battle looked at her wrist watch. 'In ten minutes the motor will come around for my brother. Do you think you could take a walk for ten minutes?'

'Oh, Mrs. Battle, yes,' returned the girl eagerly, and the lady felt inclined to kiss the face upturned to her.

'Well, you come around the side of the house to the back veranda, and don't fall into the hole the workmen are making.'

'Such a pity, your lovely lawn!' murmured Tobey.

'Yes, I could wish it had happened in November. Ruth' — she raised her voice and the handsome maid came around the portière into sight. She looked curiously at the somewhat wilted visitor. 'This young lady is returning to see me this morning. Excuse me to any one else who comes.'

'Yes, Mrs. Battle.' She opened the door for Tobey, who tripped out with one backward glance at her hostess's pleasant face.

'How can she be his sister?' she thought as she ran down the steps. 'She means to help me,' she exulted; 'I'm sure she does.'

Her thoughts kept time to the winged feet with which she began killing time along the avenue. She knew very well that daily ten o'clock departure of Douglas Adair. She had often watched the sumptuous motor gliding to the *porte-cochère*, seen him embark from the carriage step at the end of the veranda, and move swiftly along the drive to the street.

'He doesn't deserve all that!' she thought indignantly. 'He doesn't deserve that garden, or that sister, or—or Colin!'—and easily along a traveled path Tobey's thoughts glided back to the evening before, when the young musician had really seemed to like her comments and to value her opinion.

'Oh, if he had only come out this morning when old Thundercloud was lowering his head at me for all the world like an angry bull! He might have said masterfully, "Father,

you can't insult this young lady. She is my personal friend. I will ask you to tell her at once what she wishes to know." I can just see how he'd toss that fair head of his. His mother must have been a blonde.'

Tobey came out of her mental dramatization with a start and found herself far up the avenue.

'I wouldn't be late for a farm,' she thought, and turning set the winged white shoes going in the opposite direction.

'I wonder if he found my handkerchief after he got home last night.' She smiled again at the remembrance of the young man's distrait action.

No, she wasn't late. There was the shining motor going down the street now. She would know it in a thousand.

She went through the Adair gate, skirted the yellow clay and moved over the moss-like grass around to the back of the house. She recognized Jenkins, the gardener with whom she had an over-the-fence acquaintance. He was talking to another man in working clothes and stopped as they both noticed the

buoyant white figure coming over the lawn with so eager a step. Tobey nodded to Jenkins, who touched his hat, and the other man looked at her with a lowering, stupid gaze.

'How do you do,' said the girl brightly. 'Mrs. Battle is expecting me.'

'She's over there by the sweet peas, Miss,' said Jenkins, smiling and touching his hat again. 'She wants to cut 'em herself, always.'

'No wonder,' replied Tobey, and hurried on toward the luxuriantly blooming triangular hedge that hid a small kitchen garden from view.

Mrs. Battle, in her shade hat, and with her basket and scissors, had a mound of the richly colored blossoms already in the basket.

'Oh, here you are, Miss Vincent.' She turned and handed the basket to Tobey, who bowed her face over the delicious scent, and then followed Mrs. Battle, who was pulling off her gloves, up to the shade of the veranda.

'It is so lovely to be here,' said the girl. 'I look down on this garden from my window.'

'Well, it's high time you got here,' said

Mrs. Battle pleasantly. 'Jenkins tells me you often take a look through the fence.'

'And a smell,' laughed Tobey.

'Yes, he is much pleased with your appreciation. It is "love me, love my garden," with Jenkins.'

Ruth appeared through the French door and silently took the basket of sweet peas, as if it were her custom.

'Make them into a bouquet for Miss Vincent,' said Mrs. Battle. 'She will take them when she goes.'

The maid disappeared. 'I wish I knew who that girl looks like,' said Tobey. 'Some one I have known.'

'She is an unusually nice girl,' said Mrs. Battle. 'Really superior. I scarcely see why she chooses this sort of service, for I'm sure she has the ability to do something bigger; but for my sake I am glad she is contented here.'

'I am surprised you know my name, Mrs. Battle,' said the young girl, and the hostess, liking her modest, direct manner, smiled upon her kindly.

'I did put two and two together,' she replied; 'as soon as you said Mr. Bennett, I thought you must be the young protégée of the editor that I'd heard Colin talk about.'

Such a flood of color poured over Tobey's surprised face that she felt furious with herself under those pleasant, canny Scotch eyes.

'Yes, I met your nephew again at Mr. Bennett's recently.' The dignity of the tone was meant to convey formality, but the pleasant eyes went on questioning.

'Mr. Bennett is your uncle, I believe.'

'No, only adopted. My mother and he were old and close friends. She was on his paper before she died and he took me on for her sake, and, oh, Mrs. Battle, I did — I do so want to make good, and if you are going to help me you don't know my gratitude.'

'I'm thinking about it,' said the lady. 'You certainly made good with Colin the other evening. He does get a good deal of taffy given him, but he spoke of you particularly this morning. I'll spare your blushes, but I'm sure you won't mind hearing that your comments were so intelligent they were

refreshing to him after a lot of the gush he hears. He isn't conceited — Colin isn't conceited, talking that way about gush; it is only that he is very much in earnest with his music, and it makes him restless to hear people talk about it, continually barking up the wrong tree, and exhibiting how little they really know or care. He is just like his mother. Music is bred in his bones; but' — Mrs. Battle smiled into the clingingly attentive eyes — 'it isn't Colin you came to hear about. Let's hear what it is you want to know.'

CHAPTER III

THE EXPLOSION

THAT afternoon Mrs. Battle ensconced herself in her favorite nook in the library awaiting the return of her brother whose regular hours included the expectation of finding her ready to receive him. She was armed with a novel and her knitting, the novel to be perused until the familiar step sounded heavily in the hall, and hurriedly dropped in favor of the knitting as he came in.

He liked to sit in his big armchair and read the afternoon paper, while his sister, in her cool silk gown, sat opposite with her fancy work. There would seem no reason why she should not, during his preoccupation, pursue her novel, but she knew the reason was there. He liked her quick, pleasant response if anything in the news of the day moved him to an audible comment. He didn't wish to be annoyed by a hesitation in getting her attention.

To-day she dropped the book promptly on

hearing the step. It was heavier than usual, quicker than usual, and his face was furiously red as he burst into the room, a newspaper swinging from his hand.

Mrs. Battle looked up inquiringly at the black frown bent upon her. Her busy hands paused and she continued to look cool and quiet in her lavender gown. His bursts of temper never frightened her.

'It's this!' He thrust the sheet before her. It bore his picture, and an article headed: 'A Noted Financier.'

'It's that damned girl,' he ejaculated.

'What girl? The one I let out this morning?'

'Did you let her out?'

'I did.'

'Then how did she get this?'

Mrs. Battle let the paper drop and her fingers began to fly again on her needles. 'The lives of prominent and successful men are fairly well known, I imagine,' she said calmly. 'When a man makes a fortune there are always a lot of people who want to know how he did it. You are well known, rich, and

successful. It strikes me it is good advertising.'

'Pah! Advertising! How did she get that picture?' The tone was savage and Mrs. Battle lifted her calm eyebrows.

'Do sit down, Douglas. Why should you be so touchy? One might think you had something to conceal.' Mr. Adair dropped into his easy-chair and frowned again at the picture.

'You're a pretty husky man, but you know the common lot. Do you suppose there's one newspaper office in this part of the world that doesn't hold a photograph of you, *in case* —' She gave him a pleasant smile.

'Humph!'

'I always thought that quite a handsome picture of you, Douglas.'

'Bosh!'

'Yes, of course it's about ten years old now. You can see how much Duncan looks like you.'

An inarticulate growl from the depths of the armchair closed the interview as the irate man threw the crushed sheet on the floor

and buried himself in the remainder of the paper.

The maid appeared in the arched doorway.

'Mrs. Battle, the dressmaker has brought the samples you expected. She's waiting.'

The lady rose. 'Back soon, Douglas,' she said pleasantly. A deep grunt was the only response. She passed into the hall, and halfway upstairs met Colin.

'I was just coming to find you,' he said. 'Will you come to my room for a minute?'

The serious tone arrested his aunt, and she embraced his shoulders, looking questioningly into the dearest eyes on earth to her. 'I'll be there as soon as I speak to the dressmaker,' she said, apprehension in her heart. She had been conscious ever since the boy's return of an undercurrent of dissatisfaction; the discontent of her gifted darling for whom she would have life a path of roses.

When, in fifteen minutes, she arrived in his room, he was pacing up and down. He closed the door and as he looked into her troubled eyes he smiled his affection and regret.

'Sorry to mess things up for you, Aunt

Em, but I've decided to chuck the business. Yes' — at her look of distress — 'you must have seen it coming. This Saturday is my last day of grace. I must decide now or never. Monday I must slip into the harness again unless I stampede. Sit down, dear.' He placed his aunt in a chair and she looked up at him, frightened and worshiping. 'I did honestly want to please Father. I did my best in South America. I tried faithfully. I got by without disgrace, but I didn't accomplish all he hoped for by a long shot; but he is just as determined as ever to make a business man out of me. Something he let drop lately assures me that he has plans for me to carry out, and immediately. It would be death to me. You can only live in the things you have interest in. I'm a foregone failure in business, and I can succeed in music. I know it. I've already sold a few compositions. I've talked it over with Tom Knight. He wants me to write a musical comedy with him. It isn't highbrow, of course, but it's better stuff than most of them, and he's delighted with the songs I've already done for it. You know I'm

not crazy about a lot of money. I could make enough to live.'

Mrs. Battle's upward gaze at the determined figure standing over her settled into a sad seriousness.

'You realize, then, the attitude your father will take?'

'Oh, he'll wash his hands of me, doubtless, at least for a while. I talked with Uncle Alec about it last night. He has invited me to stay with him if Father kicks me out.'

Mrs. Battle's lips set and her hand went out to Colin's. He dropped on his knees at her feet, and holding her hands looked humorously into her eyes.

'I hate to do it,' he said affectionately; 'most of all because of you, Aunt Em. You're such a brick; but there isn't any other way out, and I have a right to my own life if it's a decent one. You know how unreasonable Father is.'

'Yes, I know. None better. You'll have to do as you think best, Colin.' There was silence for a minute while the boy held her hands tight and he could see the valiant,

determined look grow in her face which had always accompanied moments of stress between the father and his sons. Her gaze, which had roved in her cerebration, came back to his.

'I'll pack your suitcase and put it on the veranda near the drive,' she said. 'You can get it in case —'

'You don't think he'll turn me out to-night, do you?'

'I don't know. He's in an awful state of mind to-day. You couldn't choose a worse time to cross him. That pretty little Miss Vincent, Mr. Bennett's protégée, has put an interview with him in to-night's *Telegram*.'

'She has!' Colin rose from his lowly position and took a chair as he exclaimed with lively interest. 'How did she manage to trap him? I knew she was a winner, but *Father* —'

Mrs. Battle nodded. 'Yes, she came this morning to ask it, but your father snubbed her fiercely and reduced her to tears; she was looking so pretty, too.'

'Then how did she —'

'Yes, how did she?' repeated Mrs. Battle with a straight gaze and twitching lips. 'There was a picture, too; that one that Duncan resembles. Your father was raging.'

'Aunt Em, how did you dare? What a brick you are!'

'She was so keen on getting it, poor little thing, for her reputation with the editor, you know, and she looked so young, weeping, in her pretty white clothes.'

'She is pretty,' said Colin reminiscently, 'and a live wire, too, and sensible — and *musical*,' he finished with a keen edge to his voice. 'I'll bet she wrote a good article.'

'Yes, I think it was very good,' remarked Mrs. Battle calmly. 'I was careful —'

'Oh, were you?' Colin laughed as she stopped herself. 'Well,' he jumped up, 'when you go to the dentist, have the tooth out right away. Too bad the little Tobey got in my way.'

'I don't believe she would have, willingly. She's very musical, as you say, and she blushes like a sunrise when your name is mentioned. Why not wait till to-morrow, Colin?'

He stood looking down at her for a minute. 'Can you think of any one of my father's moods in which he would be likely to take my decision agreeably?'

Mrs. Battle jumped up. 'I'll get your suitcase,' she said.

'And unless I'm incapacitated I'll come back in a little while and tell you the outcome.'

'Yes, and I'll take all this manuscript from your desk. He might destroy it if he saw it.' She was already trembling with apprehension. 'Colin' — she approached him and lifted her arms around his neck, love in her voice — 'everything may go better than I fear, but whatever comes, remember that you are my boy. If you leave suddenly, I will get your belongings together and to you. Remember, you'll be in my mind and in my heart every minute.'

Colin held her close in his arms an instant, kissed her warmly, and was gone.

Every moment bore in more strongly on Mrs. Battle the fact that Douglas Adair would not brook this disappointment and

mutiny. Foreseeing that the room she was in might be closed, she began speedily to gather Colin's belongings and carry armfuls of them across the hall into her own room. She stuffed her closet with masculine habiliments, crowded what music and music paper were lying on the desk into her bureau drawers, and had a suitcase in one hand and a leather bag in the other when a wrathful voice from the foot of the stairs roared her name.

Flinging the bags inside her door and closing it, her voice shook a little as she replied, 'Coming, Douglas.'

A last rush into Colin's room to close open dresser drawers and closets, then, her knees feeling weak, she laid hold of the banister and descended. Her brother was standing by the newel post. He glared at her, but did not speak. With a peremptory motion of his hand he ordered her into the library. She obeyed in silence, casting an apprehensive look about the room, fearing some sign of her unhappy boy might meet her.

The room was empty.

'Sit down,' ordered Douglas Adair, and

she noticed that the big-knuckled hands clutching the lapels of his coat were as unsteady as her own voice.

'Colin has been here. Perhaps he told you he was coming. He informed me that he wishes to sit at a piano the rest of his life; wishes to write jigs for chorus girls to prance to, and silly songs for them to sing; to be a popinjay instead of a man. He asked my permission to do this. I told him certainly he could, but not here.'

A fierce glare met Mrs. Battle's gaze.

'And I've called you to make you understand that I'm through with him and that you must be.' The angry man approached nearer the table beside which his sister was sitting and gave it a resounding blow. 'I'll not be humiliated! If my daughter, Elizabeth, had turned to this effeminate stuff, it would have been natural enough, she wears skirts.'

'Elizabeth was not Marion's daughter,' said Mrs. Battle, and her quiet voice belied her heartbeats. 'Your sweet wife bequeathed her talent and taste to her child.'

'Well, he should have fought it, fought the weakness, and taken his place as a man in the world.'

'He tried to please you, Douglas. You must admit it.'

'He tried, perhaps, but with the full intention of failing. The ungrateful hound!'

'Douglas!' Mrs. Battle sprang to her feet, her face crimson. 'The servants will hear you.'

'I want them to. I want every one under this roof to know that one who was a member of my family has ceased to exist for me. He is not to be allowed to cross this threshold and I don't want to hear his name.'

The furious man met a gaze as steely as his own, and his sister's low voice had no tremor now.

'Douglas, I am amazed at you. The boy may not be your son, but he is my nephew. Let me tell you that you can turn me out of your house if you wish to, but you can't control my tongue or my actions. Colin is the dearest creature on earth to me and I'll never give him up.'

The man's jaws snapped together and his big hands clenched.

'Then go!' he ejaculated. 'I'll have my orders obeyed in this house.'

'Very well,' came the steady voice. 'I've kept your family together and reared your children for nearly twenty years. You are incapable, of course, of any appreciation of what that has meant. Nothing you have ever given me could repay me for what I've done for you, and I should be glad to go but that I know your household needs me.'

Douglas Adair looked at her threateningly beneath the lowering black brows, but it was easy for her now to be valiant. It was settled. Colin had gone.

'You tempt me to match my temper against yours, and desert the ship, but I know you will get no one else to look after your interests as I do; so we will both think it over for a few days.'

Another pause during which brother and sister continued his defiant and her accusing gaze.

She spoke again. 'If I go out, the check I

have put upon my tongue for years will be released.'

Douglas Adair moved his head and his scowl was questioning.

'I turned a deaf ear to the mutterings that accused you, years ago; that said you had robbed another man of his life-work. I wanted to keep your children's respect for their father. I was distressed and doubtful about my own duty. Now, if I go out from your house, Douglas, I shall investigate, and if I can give comfort to those who have been wronged I shall do it.'

'You are talking bosh,' declared her brother. 'If anything could have been proved against me, it would have been done long ago.'

Mrs. Battle regarded him sadly, and slowly shook her head. 'Public opinion is stronger than a court of law,' she said. 'My conscience has never been satisfied, never easy. If I leave your house, I shall accept your word as a release.'

With Douglas Adair's black scowl transferred to the table, she brushed by him, her

soft silk rustling faintly, and made her way up to her room.

A few minutes afterward she heard heavy steps on the stair, and through her slightly open door listened to the sounds she had expected. Two keys turned in their locks, one fastened Colin's door to the bathroom which connected his room with Duncan's, and the other closed it from the hall.

Then the heavy steps went downstairs again and Mrs. Battle, holding a quivering lip between her teeth, set about her task. The sky darkened and a summer shower began to beat against the windows. She dashed the drops from her eyes the better to see her darling's manuscripts.

For the first time she rejoiced that her brother was a pagan who did not believe in church-going, despite his good Presbyterian ancestors. She would have the motor to herself in the morning to do her errand without remark.

When suitcase and bag were packed, she sent for Ruth.

'I want you to do something for me,' she

said when the girl appeared. 'My brother and Mr. Colin have quarreled and my nephew has gone away for a time.'

The maid's clear eyes met her employer's with sympathy. 'I'm sorry,' she said.

'I want to take some of his things to him. I'd like you to carry these bags to your room and in the morning early put them in the motor and tell the chauffeur I wish to leave for church at ten-thirty.'

Ruth smiled faintly into the reddened eyes. 'I will certainly do so, Mrs. Battle,' she said gently, 'but don't take it so to heart. It isn't a situation that can last.' And the grieved woman, wiping her eyes, wondered how much had been heard below-stairs of her brother's violence.

Ruth was a lady, whatever her occupation in life.

'Did — did you and the others hear anything of my brother's excitement?' asked Mrs. Battle.

'I closed the doors into the hall and the dining-room,' replied the maid quietly, 'and the windows were open. Jenkins was scolding

the delivery boy outside for stepping through the flower bed and the butler was laughing at them. There was a good deal of noise.'

Mrs. Battle looked at the girl, whose fine face flushed under her grateful regard. 'Thank you, Ruth,' she said. 'Take the suitcase first, please.'

CHAPTER IV

OVER THE FENCE

TOBEY's hour of leaving the house in the morning was variable and Cousin Ann Sally's idea of mothering her included taking breakfast with her, hatted and dressed for the walk to the office, whether early or late.

This Monday morning they entered the dining-room at their favorite hour; the business men had gone and the ladies of leisure had not yet come down. The two had seated themselves and begun eating the fruit standing ready for them when suddenly Anthracite burst into the room with a clatter which brought Miss Sally's most disapproving frown upon him.

'Scoop, Miss Tobey!' he gasped, apparently just recovering from a breathless run.

'Do you mean your new suit?' she asked, turning with a lazy laugh to meet his bulging eyes. 'Want that cap written up?'

'He's daid. Big boss 'round the corner

daid, Miss Tobey' — then, as the girl's brow wrinkled — 'murdered. Big boss murdered right in his bed. Scoop fer you, Miss Tobey.'

'Anthracite, you're spoiled,' she exclaimed, displeased. 'Such jokes —'

'Hope to die, Miss Tobey, cross my heart.' The little black paw crossed the immaculate serge of his new white uniform. 'You kin go to the winder.'

Tobey and Cousin Ann Sally sprang to their feet.

'Mr. Adair, do you mean?' questioned the latter, uncertain as yet whether to box the boy's ears or to pump him.

'That's him. There's detectives all over the place.' Anthracite's breath still came hard, for he had been doing a marathon around the house and neighborhood seeking points of vantage.

Tobey grasped Miss Sally's arm. She was pale.

'Come on to the kitchen,' said the older woman; 'that's the place to find out things.'

Anthracite's story confirmed, Tobey rushed, quivering, to the telephone and called

up Robert Bennett's house. He answered at once.

'Uncle Bob, it's Tobey.'

'What's the matter, girlie, you sound queer.'

'Something wonderful — yes, terrible — terrible. Mr. Adair has been murdered. What I want — I know the family — will you let me work on it?'

'What an awful thing! Yes — I was proud of you for getting that interview. Perhaps being acquainted with the family — Yes, Tobey, you have *carte blanche*. Gaynes, too, you understand.'

She was dressed for the office and she hurried from the telephone and joined Miss Sally, who was in the kitchen with Mrs. Caraway and the cook.

'Tell Miss Vincent what you just told me,' said Cousin Ann Sally to the big colored Mandy.

'Yes, Miss Tobey, you better write up for yo' paper what I seen last night. 'Twas a right warm night, and you know I'se lookin' over the fence hopin' Araby'd come out —

she's the Adairs' cook — and then I thought I see some one prowlin' around the garden in there and in a minute more I see 'twas Mis' Battle pickin' flowers. 'Twas long after nine o'clock, and thinks I 'twas odd for her to be over there by the sweet peas late's that, and this mawnin', when Araby and Jenkins and the rest o' the help was runnin' round like mad, an' I found Mist' Adair had been made 'way with, I just wondered' — Mandy's big shoulder lifted shudderingly — 'I just wondered if that *was* Mis' Battle pickin' them sweet peas so late.'

Tobey's eyes were dark. 'Are you sure you saw some one? Mightn't it have been a shadow?'

'No'm, Miss Tobey. An automobile happened to be backin' round in the street just then and the lights flashed right on that woman. She had a hat clamped down low on her haid and I thought that was queer, too, for Miss Battle in the evenin'. Tell the truth, 'fore the auto light switched on I thought it was prob'ly that feller Tom sneakin' in to git flowers or somep'n worse.

He's a limb, that Tom is; he's the under-gardener, you know, an' Araby says she ain't never sure where she'll find anything, he's that light-fingered; but Mr. Adair, he seem to like him and keep him on, spite of all.'

'In his bed!' said Tobey; 'Anthracite said murdered in his bed.'

Mrs. Caraway, whose face had been glued to the window looking into the next yard, here turned sharply on the boy, who with open mouth was drinking in every word.

'Go to your place in the hall at once!' she cried severely.

From the window they could all see men moving here and there about the grounds and Tobey spied Jenkins standing stock-still between the flower beds.

Like a flash she was out of the kitchen door and running down the back steps, hotly pursued by Cousin Ann Sally, whose hat was slightly askew.

'Jenkins,' she called, clinging to the fence. The man heard her and looked across. Recognizing his flower-loving friend, he came slowly forward.

'I'm horror-struck, Jenkins. So, so sorry for you all.'

The man's pale, set face remained frozen under her greeting.

'Tell me, was Mr. Adair in his bed?' she pursued, managing to convey such a personal touch of sympathy that Jenkins's tongue was loosened.

'He was not,' he replied portentously. ''Twas me found him.'

'Oh, Jenkins, you poor fellow. This is my cousin Miss Sally from out of town. She is a very old friend of Mr. Adair, and we feel it, and we are so interested. Do tell us.'

Jenkins, still in a nightmare, and always getting in the detectives' way, found an agreeable light of eagerness and sympathetic attention in the eyes of the young reporter, whose gaze occasionally wandered to the men searching about the grounds.

''Twas this way,' began Jenkins impressively. 'It's my duty at seven o'clock in the morning to sweep off the verandas. This morning, when I come to this one at the back, I noticed yellow earth tracks that must have

come from feet that had crossed the soft earth out there where they're making repairs. The tracks led to one of the French winders and then I noticed the winder was open a ways. I made sure a burglar had been here. I hurried to the winder, and then I saw that the lights were on in the library.' The narrator paused and took a moment's gloomy satisfaction from Tobey's spellbound eyes.

'I stepped into the room and saw a piece of Mr. Adair's dressing-gown stickin' out from the side of his big wing chair. The chair was turned toward one o' the bookcases. I looked a little farther, and there was Mr. Adair himself, slumped to a corner of the chair with his back in full view.' Jenkins clapped a hand to his eyes for a moment and then went on. 'I tried to speak, and I couldn't, 'cause I saw, all mixed up with the figures in his dressing-gown, a terrible stain.'

'Oh, you poor man!' Tobey spoke as he paused.

'I did get a word out at last. "Mr. Adair," I said, the chills runnin' down my spine. No answer and not a move. His hand hung down.

I couldn't stir for a minute, then I sort o' tumbled out into the hall and pulled myself upstairs by the banister to Mr. Colin's room, and knocked. No answer. Then I pounded. No answer, and I kept poundin' till Mrs. Battle come out of her room across the hall, all dressed like it was noon, and Mr. Duncan, in his pajamas, came out of his room at the same time. "What the devil," he says. "I guess so," says I, my teeth just clickin' together. "It's Mr. Adair, sir, down in the library. Somethin' has happened." With that they both ran downstairs, and we all stood in that room, half chokin' with horror. There was a book on the floor between the chair and the shelves and a vacant space that showed where he had pulled it out just before he was struck.' Jenkins swallowed, and his rapt audience spurred him on.

'He told us, Mr. Duncan did, to stay where we were and not touch his father, nor to touch one thing in the room while he called Dr. Cooper.

'When he came back from the 'phone, I showed him, out the winder, where he could

see the footprints on the yellow clay on the grass. I told him there was some of it on the veranda, too. So he turned off the lights and sent me to tell the chauffeur to stand out in front and not let anybody go around the house except by the driveway; and to tell Tom to stay near the garage and keep every one away from the rear, but' — Jenkins paused importantly — 'he wanted me to stay near, as I should be needed later. No one must leave the house or the grounds, he said, until the coroner had been here.'

'And did the coroner come?'

'Sure he did,' responded Jenkins in the hollow voice he had been using, 'and he had us all up and questioned us. Dr. Cooper said he thought the murder had happened about midnight. Then come all these detective fellers; they've been goin' over every inch o' the ground.'

'What are they doing over there by the window of that little house?'

'Oh, the tool-house. Gettin' finger-prints, I guess. I see Tom's lighted out.' Jenkins gave a sepulchral utterance which he probably

intended for a scornful exclamation as he followed Tobey's gaze. 'That was another thing. I found the tool house winder open this morning. It's always locked except when I open it myself. I have the key to the tool-house and at night lock the winder on the inside and then the door, and open 'em in the mornin', so the detectives are gettin' the finger-prints around that winder.'

'How do they do it?' asked Tobey eagerly. 'I wish they'd let me see them.'

'They won't, though. They scatter on some kind of a powder, and then they photograph 'em. They've been taking 'em in the house — the library table.' Jenkins shuddered.

'Do you see what somebody has done to the sweet peas, Jenkins? The vines look torn in one place.' Tobey pointed across accusingly.

'The detectives didn't do that,' returned Jenkins wearily. 'That was another thing that happened last night.'

Mandy's tale of the prowler in the garden came back to Tobey.

'That ain't anything new, though,' went

on the gardener. 'Folks often steal the flowers. I try to get Mrs. Battle to keep a dog, but she says she has such sympathy for folks that want flowers enough to steal 'em that she won't have 'em bit.'

'Our cook says she thought she saw Mrs. Battle picking flowers rather late last evening,' said Tobey tentatively.

Jenkins shook his solemn head. 'She always uses scissors, and she wouldn't leave 'em lookin' that way.'

Tobey, watching the speaker closely, saw that this old grievance of thieves was too customary to excite in him any suspicion of a clue.

Cousin Ann Sally's attention was wandering. She noticed now a servant leaving one of the entrances of the big house and bringing out what were apparently a bunch of full trash baskets. She watched the girl walk back on the drive and disappear around the corner of the tool-house; then return with empty baskets. The alley was free for all. Miss Sally walked back through the yard to the alley and out and along the Adair fence.

She could see a bit of paved ground behind the garage where stood an incinerator into which the baskets had evidently been emptied.

Tobey noticed her departure, but she was determined not to lose her hold on Jenkins.

'You spoke just now of Tom "lighting out." He is your assistant, isn't he?'

'Well, supposed to be. He's a lazy lout.'

'Did you say that about his leaving in a hurry because you thought he felt guilty of anything?'

Again Jenkins gave his sepulchral snort. 'He's lifted a few things here. We know it, but somehow he always got around Mr. Adair.'

'What's his name?'

'Brogan.'

'What's his address?'

Jenkins turned and regarded his piquant companion curiously.

'What do you want to know that for, Miss Vincent?'

'Because I'm a newspaper woman,' she responded crisply, 'and there's nothing in the

whole world that we don't want to know.'

Jenkins gave her the required address and watched, still gloomily, while she wrote it on a little pad of paper.

'Oh, they're going away now, do you see?' Tobey looked up and gazed at the uniformed and plain-clothes men who moved down the driveway and vanished. One policeman maintained his place in the rear of the grounds. 'Now, Jenkins, see if he won't let me in,' she coaxed. 'Don't tell him I'm from the paper, but tell him I'm a neighbor and a friend.'

The policeman was young and bored and had been far from indifferent to the girlish figure in the short blue dress, with whom the gardener was having such a confab. Jenkins moved across to him and Tobey scurried through the yard and into the alley and had darted to the Adair gate and opened it before Jenkins had finished stating his case. Cousin Ann Sally, hovering about, was at her heels.

'Mr. Policeman, I'm a family friend,' said the girl, approaching and turning the battery of smiling eyes upon him. 'I won't do any

harm. I'm going to send a note into the house very soon, but I'm just so curious to see what the detectives were doing to that window-sill; and to see those poor sweet peas over there, too. Isn't it a shame the way some one has pulled them over?'

The policeman gave a slow, doubtful smile, and while he considered, Cousin Ann Sally slipped out of sight behind the garage, close to the open-work wire receptacle, and began busily poking the scraps of paper about. Tobey moved to the still open tool-house window.

'Don't touch nothin',' called the guardian of the law.

The girl crossed her hands behind her back, and twinkled at him over her shoulder, pursing her rosy lips and shaking her head. 'They have had powder here,' she said; 'I wanted to see.' She gazed into the shed, yearning to know what interest it had held for the mysterious visitor who had opened the window. She saw hoe, rake, stepladder, and lengths of garden hose. She saw shelves in the dim corners holding oil and varnish

cans and various items of Jenkins's working paraphernalia. Turning away she met the watchful eyes of the policeman. She went up to him.

'Will it be all right, if I keep on the path, for me to go over to look at the sweet peas? Mr. Adair's sister loves them so, she will be sorry —'

'Oh, yes, I suppose so,' returned the man grudgingly, in spite of the flattering humility of her request.

Tobey cast a seeking glance about, and walking to the corner of the tool-house beheld her sister-sleuth groping in the incinerator.

'You'd better go back to the house, Cousin Ann Sally,' she said, approaching, 'you need your coffee. I'm going to send a note in to Mrs. Battle. Perhaps she will see me, and it would be better for there to be only one of us. I'll tell you everything that happens. Goodbye for now.'

Miss Sally's hat was more rakishly askew than before. She gave a preoccupied assent.

As Tobey turned away, she heard the garbage wagon coming down the alley. She gave

a look at Jenkins, who was still standing stiffly near by, in his important attitude of chief mourner.

'I wonder if they looked in the garbage,' she said carelessly, and, the can standing there by the alley gate, she whisked off the cover.

The refuse within had been rolled in paper. Something stiff stuck up from the soft mass. The girl stooped, keen eyes luminous. 'Jenkins!' she cried, and the shrill call brought both men to the spot. She pointed at the smeared handle of some implement.

'Careful — finger-prints —' said Tobey. The policeman reached thumb and finger low down on the handle and slowly drew forth a knife. All four of the watchers regarded its dark stained blade with starting eyes.

It was a carving-knife, worn thin with much sharpening.

'Our knife!' uttered Jenkins — 'Araby's pet carving-knife that she's been hunting and scolding about for days. She said she'd bet Tom —'He stopped himself, and wet his stiff lips, his starting eyes glued to the dark blade.

'Give it to me,' said Tobey in a shaking voice.

'No, Miss,' returned the policeman. 'I'll 'phone to headquarters at once, but I will say' — he looked at the girl admiringly, the horrid trophy depending from his hand — 'if this is what it looks to be, and you can turn up anything more of importance, you'd better stick around.'

Tobey made a gesture to Cousin Ann Sally, who could see that the girl was too excited to speak. As soon as she had seen her cousin disappear through the gate into the alley, Tobey, her heart still bounding excitedly, turned to Jenkins.

'Take in a note for me, please,' she said, and, seating herself on the tool-house step, took out the paper pad from her purse and wrote as follows:

Dear Mrs. Battle:

This is not the time to intrude upon your grief, but I am full of sympathy for you and long to help you. You know this sad event will be public at once and my chief is the sort who would wish, as far as possible, to have you protected from un-

necessary and embarrassing publicity. Will you help me by answering one question? Were you picking flowers in your garden last night after nine o'clock? Jenkins thinks it was not you, but will you let me be sure?

With profound sympathy
TOBEY VINCENT

Jenkins carried the note away for her. She noticed that he did not go into the house by the library window, but entered through another door.

CHAPTER V

THE REPORTER

With the finding of the knife, all sense of intrusion had vanished from Tobey's mind. Thrilled to the core by the possibility of the fulfillment of her ambition, to uncover, step by step, the sinuous windings that lead to a criminal deed, she waited, sitting on the step of that same veranda from which she had been so contemptuously ousted but two days before.

The garden was very peaceful. The fountain sparkled and played. She saw the policeman come out of the house and go back to his station.

As Jenkins did not return at once, she rose and moved over to the hedge of sweet peas, riotous this morning with blossoms, sumptuous in color and scent. She stood before the spot where a careless, hurried hand had torn at the vines, and she shook her head and

smiled at the incongruity of ideas which could picture preparing for a murder by gathering a nosegay. Several blossoms lay withered on the ground and a torn piece of newspaper was near them, half concealed by the drooping vine. She stooped and picked it up. It was part of her Adair interview in the *Telegram*. The picture of Douglas Adair had been jaggedly beheaded and the dark eyes looked up at her sternly. She folded the jammed, soiled piece and put it in her handbag.

She thought of Colin Adair and wondered how this terrible shock had affected his temperamental nature. She wondered if she should see him if Jenkins brought word that Mrs. Battle would receive her. Many times since that interview Saturday morning had the remembrance of his approval, as recounted by Mrs. Battle, recurred to her, and she basked in it secretly.

Now she knew she was going to challenge his approval in another line, and instinctively she felt that she probably would not win it. The poetical Colin Adairs of the world would

be repulsed by the idea of a girl rushing into the realm of the police. Leave that to such as Jim Gaynes.

In the short, scant-skirted fashion of the day, with her white turndown collar, gray silk stockings, and sandal shoes, she seemed like a child to the eyes of the gray-haired man who now came out of the house upon the veranda with Jenkins. He looked doubtfully toward the blue figure.

'Yes, that's her, Mr. Wentworth,' said Jenkins dolefully.

The thick-set gentleman descended the veranda steps, and Tobey, hearing the sound, came out of her brown study and turned to meet him as he came along the path. This man with the strong, kindly face attracted her at once. There were humorous lines about his eyes and mouth, and perhaps it was owing to the episode of the knife, but at any rate his gaze was approving.

'Miss Vincent, I am Alec Wentworth, Mr. Adair's lawyer,' he said, and as he held out his hand she gave him hers. 'I have been hearing a good deal about you, and especially

your last thrilling exploit. Will you come up on the veranda where we can talk?'

Tobey soon found herself sitting in the chair where Douglas Adair had been reading his paper on Saturday, and her companion placed himself close beside her and spoke softly.

'Mrs. Battle sent me to answer your note. She was not in the garden last night. Is there something else that I can tell you?'

Sparkling, eager youth looked into his admiring eyes. 'Everything, Mr. Wentworth, everything that you will, because — because it is my great chance. I am a newspaper woman,' she answered softly.

Alec Wentworth laughed a little under his breath. 'Yes, I know you wrote that interview with Mr. Adair. Mrs. Battle told me. She says, though, that you are more like a humming-bird than a reporter, always hovering over the flowers.'

Tobey flushed under his kindly eyes, pleased to find so friendly an aid. She shook her head. 'This morning I'm no humming-bird,' she replied. 'I feel more like a hawk

with its foot on the prey. It is my first attempt at a criminal case and my chief is giving me a chance. You can imagine how much I want to succeed without offending the family, so any items you will give me —'

'Come into the house.'

Tobey followed her guide through the French window, and he showed her the chair in which the master had been sitting and explained the position of the body. He told her that a handkerchief had been found, stuffed down in the chair beside him, and the man had used it to wipe off the knife.

'Why do you say "man?"'

'Because it is inconceivable that a woman would have the strength to deal that blow. Ask another.'

'Who was in the house that night?'

'The family — except Colin. Mr. Adair's daughter, Mrs. Trude, lives in the West. She has a week-old baby and Mrs. Battle is, of course, not sending for her. You know the boys, Duncan and Colin?'

'I have met them.'

'Yes, I know. I hear you are a kindred

spirit to Colin's music, as well as to Mrs. Battle's flowers. That brings you quite close to the family.'

'I wouldn't offend them for anything,' said Tobey, 'but there will be others —'

The lawyer nodded emphatically. 'You are quite right. I'll help you all I can.' Tobey lifted a quick glance of appreciation from the paper on which she was making notes.

'Duncan was out that evening until about eleven o'clock, but he saw nothing unusual about the house when he returned.'

Tobey reflected with a pang that she knew something about Duncan's whereabouts that evening which would interest the lawyer.

'Did you say Colin was away?' she asked.

The lawyer's eyebrows came down slightly and he hesitated sufficiently for her to note it.

'Why, Colin spent last night with me,' he answered. 'As it was Sunday night, and there were only Mrs. Battle and her brother at home for the evening luncheon, the servants had all gone out except the cook, who went to bed about nine o'clock. The butler came in

at ten and sat reading in the servants' sitting-room. Ruth, the waitress, had come in about eleven o'clock and had spoken to the butler and gone upstairs. Mrs. Battle and her brother had gone upstairs soon after supper to their separate rooms.'

Tobey's mother had armed her with a knowledge of shorthand and she was quickly recording each item.

'At about nine o'clock Mrs. Battle went into her brother's room to discuss some household affair and they talked for half or three quarters of an hour. As she was undressing for bed, she recalled having left the library window open and went downstairs to close it. A light was always kept burning in the hall all night. The library was consequently not dark, but it was only faintly illuminated. She had enough light to find her way across the room to the window and close and lock it. She felt sure that no one was in the room —'

'But some one might have been in the house.' Tobey looked up and the lawyer nodded gravely.

'Yes, some one might have been in the

house. There were muddy imprints in a corner of the drawing-room, looking as if some one might have hidden there while Mrs. Battle was in the library locking up, but they were faint. No, the footsteps marked with clay were probably those of a member of the family. As Mrs. Battle was undressing, she heard her brother in his room. He had a particularly rasping way of clearing his throat. She lay awake for some time, for she had much on her mind, but she did not hear him leave his room. His light was on this morning. He was a light sleeper and frequently got up to get a book to read. Evidently he had gone downstairs to get one. The lights were on in the library this morning — and the book had dropped from his hand to the floor. The doctor thought he had been killed about midnight.'

Tobey looked up again. 'How about the servants?'

'Servants? All except two have been in the family from twenty to twenty-five years. Ruth is new, but highly thought of by Mrs. Battle.'

'Yes, I know,' replied Tobey, and her very ears burned as her stern young eyes fell again to the paper.

'Tom Brogan, the under-gardener, is the other. He had been engaged by Mr. Adair himself, and, although he has been more than suspected by Mrs. Battle of making off with small things, Mrs. Battle says her brother seemed unwilling to let her discharge him. That knife had certainly been stolen from the house. It was missed a few days ago and there is no mistaking it.'

Tobey and her new friend looked in each other's eyes for a silent moment, then the lawyer proceeded.

'The person who stole the knife may have committed the murder and may not. The murderer probably hid in the tool-house, as the window was unlocked and open.'

'How about finger-prints?' asked Tobey.

'Yes, the police have taken those of the entire family in order to eliminate those that were unnecessary for detection. I don't know what conclusion they have reached, but I believe they are as yet in the dark.'

'Was it Mr. Adair's own handkerchief the man picked up to wipe the knife?'

'No, it was a woman's, but none of us believes a woman did it. She wouldn't have the strength.'

'Could Mr. Adair himself have opened the French window after Mrs. Battle locked it?'

'No, it is unlikely. He had a mania against draughts. He was only comfortable in hot weather. That is why they stay here so late in the season. A little while in August is the only time Mr. Adair would take a vacation, and last night he was in his night-clothes, you know, and he would never have opened the window.'

As the speaker paused, Tobey spoke gratefully.

'You have done me a great favor, Mr. Wentworth.' She rose to go, and he followed her example.

'Surely not more than we owe you,' he replied, following her into the hall, and at that moment Colin came down the broad staircase. When he saw them, he paused, and in the instant of seeing him Tobey's heart gave a

bound which drove the blood into her cheeks. The young fellow's pallor, as much as his changed expression, made him seem like a totally different being from the effervescent, popular college boy she had met a few times. As he paused, she felt that he would like to withdraw and avoid her, and she moved to go out the door at once, after a slight bow of recognition, but Mr. Wentworth intervened.

'Your friend Miss Vincent, Colin. Come and thank her for what she has done for us.'

The young fellow hastened his steps and, running downstairs, advanced and took the girl's hand in his cold one, with that smile which she thought a most select ray of sunshine.

'You certainly had an inspiration,' he said, and her speaking young eyes poured such sympathy into his that he felt vague comfort from its sweetness. 'That interview that you and Aunt Em fixed up, though —'

'I'm going to Aunt Em,' interrupted the lawyer. 'You two youngsters fight it out. *Au revoir*, Miss Vincent, call upon me any time, you know.' He hurried up the stairs.

His heart was sore for his godson, and he felt that the humming-bird would be good for him.

Tobey withdrew the hand, still glowing. 'What does he mean — fight?'

'Can't you sit down for a minute more?' Colin asked it politely; the girl felt that he cared very little whether she did or not, but she wanted to see him, she yearned, almost maternally, to comfort him. She looked up to him, she admired him, she felt rich in the opportunity to be with him in his trouble. There was a velvet-covered bench near them. She sank upon it and he sat beside her.

'Did Mr. Wentworth mean that you didn't like the interview?'

'Oh, it was a good interview.' Colin paused. 'I didn't know but it might have stirred up somebody's grudge against Dad. That's all.'

Tobey's eyes widened. 'I never thought of that. How could it?'

Colin yawned; one of the suppressed yawns that almost defy the imprisoning hand. Tobey felt that he was weary in every fiber of him. Grief could do that, she supposed.

'Oh, one man's success is another man's poison sometimes,' returned Colin. 'It was a very nice interview, and I shouldn't have thought of such a thing if we hadn't been cudgeling our brains. You and Aunt Em are snappy collaborators.' Again a quick flash of the sunny smile irradiated the white face.

'It was very kind of her,' said Tobey, 'but you startle me terribly by suggesting that I precipitated such a tragedy by a bit of ambition.'

Colin shook his head. 'Aunt Em was the culprit if there is any.' He spoke absent-mindedly. 'Had it been your work single-handed, I should have kept such a guess to myself.' He lifted his moody eyes and smiled at her again, then relapsed under his cloud.

Tobey kept silence for a bit, then went on: 'You speak of cudgeling your brains in the effort to guess. I want you to know how engrossed I am in the tragedy and how I hope that my stroke of luck this morning may be a prophecy of what I can still do. I suppose you all hate and dread the newspapers.'

'No,' said Colin, again abstracted, his gaze

on the rug at their feet. 'I know that is your profession. I saw your note to Aunt Em. Mr. Bennett is letting you —' he paused.

'Yes; and I want so much not to offend you.'

Colin's gaze came back from the rug and fixed again on those eloquent eyes. Why should she dread to offend him? Those soft pools of light spoke a universal language. Colin, sore, wretched, felt a wave of surprise.

'She's a peach,' he thought; 'a snappy, clever girl, but with a big heart.'

'You mean you don't want to offend the family —'

'Yes. You can understand how I must feel, but I want to solve the problem, and the public has to know the steps.'

'I see, but you're a mighty little girl to be mixing yourself up in such things.' He looked the dainty figure over.

'But I'm not stupid, Mr. Adair,' she returned with soft eagerness, 'and I'm so deeply interested.'

At this moment the maid Ruth entered the

hall and approached them. Both faces of the young people on the bench lost their warmth. Tobey glanced up at the girl, and the repulsion that seized her was accompanied by surprise at the maid's look of suffering. It was too genuine to be a pose. Could she have found a kindly spot in that repellent Scotch granite?

Colin looked up with a short, inquiring 'Well?'

Tobey wondered if that was his ordinary attitude and tone when addressing a servant. Was he a snob?

Ruth approached. 'Your brother has telephoned that he will be at home at five o'clock,' she said.

Colin nodded and the girl withdrew. Tobey noticed the added gravity of her companion's downcast look, the compression of his lips.

Suddenly he looked up and again met his companion's eyes: 'My brother Duncan is a fine fellow, Miss Vincent,' he said abruptly.

'No doubt he is,' she agreed.

'The one of us that didn't disappoint Dad. I was a terrible failure in his eyes.'

'We can't please everybody,' answered the girl, feeling that the trite reply was inadequate return to those sensitive, quivering lips.

'No — but when it comes to one's Dad —' Colin rose and began pacing the floor. 'I feel as if I could never write any more music.'

'That is natural,' said Tobey quietly, 'but you will, and probably better music than ever.'

He stood still, looking down into the face so full of confidence and pride, saturated with that enveloping other element. What if, in this case, it were only an evolution from pity? It was there, and she was a pretty girl and a sweet girl, and for the moment she made him feel not quite such a forlorn derelict.

'I must go,' she said, starting up, and he took her hand and felt gratefully the warmth streaming from her eyes. 'Keep your thoughts on your music,' she said. 'What you want now is harmony. I will look after the discord.'

'You! You little humming-bird —' A silent interchange between them, then he added, 'We all thank you — Tobey.'

She smiled at him. 'I am going to work for you — Colin.'

She ran out the door, down the steps, her heart beating with happy excitement, and she did not stop until Anthracite opened the door for her.

'Have they found out who done it, Miss Tobey? You look like yo' eyes was just dancin' out o' yo' haid.'

'Well, they know that you didn't do it, Anthracite, and it's such a relief to me.' She ran upstairs to Cousin Ann Sally's room and on the way took a hint from the boy's comment and composed her features.

Miss Sally, making a hurried toilet, her mouth full of pins, met her with a wail. Ejecting the pins one by one and sticking them in the blouse she was fastening, she voiced her woe:

'What d'you think! [pin] Got to go home! [pin] Telegram! [pin] Lawyer [pin] says he's sold [pin] my lot [the last pin] and I must come home to sign the papers. Just as I was beginning to be such a help to you.' Cousin Ann Sally tossed her head and Tobey felt she

was champing at the bit. 'It was wonderful your finding the weapon —'

'We don't know that it was the weapon,' put in Tobey.

'Anybody could see that it was — horrid thing! Wasn't Em Battle excited and grateful to you — smarter than the detectives?'

'I didn't see her.'

'Where have you been all the time, then?'

'Their lawyer, Mr. Wentworth, talked with me and was very kind. I have to go right down to the office now —'

'Wait a minute. Didn't I tell you I was a natural-born sleuth?' Cousin Ann Sally spoke triumphantly. 'I felt in my bones the minute that girl came out of the house with those waste-paper baskets that I'd find something. Come over here to the desk.'

Tobey followed, and neatly pieced together she saw a number of yellow bits of paper. It was a telegram, and it was legible, addressed to Miss Ruth Valentine.

'I used to know a Ruth Valentine, but she married,' said Miss Sally excitedly. 'Queer it's the same name. Look!' She pointed with

her finger at the disjointed words, Tobey looking over her shoulder.

'"At large again. Be on the watch. D. A." Douglas Adair, plain enough.'

'One of the maids there is named Ruth,' said Tobey, her eyes glued to the initials.

'What on earth would he be telegraphing one of the maids for?' said the puzzled Miss Sally. 'Oh, Tobey, it's a shame I've got to go away, I could be such a help to you! I'd ferret out what Douglas Adair meant by that, as sure as you stand there.'

Tobey was still and thoughtful. 'Perhaps it will come out at the inquest,' she said.

'When is the inquest?' asked Miss Sally in agonized tones.

'To-morrow morning at ten o'clock, there at the house.'

'Would they let me in, do you suppose?'

'They'd have to. An inquest is public.'

'Oh!' Miss Sally wrung her hands. 'I do wish he hadn't sold that pesky land!'

CHAPTER VI

THE SLEUTH

To Tobey the initials signing the telegram did not stand for Douglas Adair.

Yesterday, while she was still exulting over pleasing her chief with Saturday's interview and picture, she felt she would like to talk it over with a friend in the office who had been a witness of the little stir caused by her bringing in the copy. Mr. Bennett and Jim Gaynes had both been present.

'Tell us how you got around the old man,' the editor had chuckled.

'Yes, I'd like to know myself,' said Gaynes. 'I tried it once and had to go home for liniment.'

'Oh, I just won the Battle,' returned Tobey, bridling and enjoying her small private joke.

'You vamped the old gent, just as I wanted you to,' said the editor with satisfaction. 'Go

to the head, Tobey. We can't expect a girl to tell how she vamps 'em, can we, Gaynes?'

Tobey laughed and sparkled and triumphed. 'Oh, it's just that there's another field besides love and war where everything goes, and that's the newspaper business,' she said.

Ann Lamont, Mr. Bennett's stenographer, sitting at her desk, looked over at the girl kindly.

'I think it was simply that Mr. Adair is human after all. Who could refuse Tobey?' she said.

Tobey was going over all this in her mind on Sunday evening. She had been to church in the morning with Cousin Ann Sally, who had had the satisfaction of seeing Mrs. Battle and Duncan in the pew which Douglas Adair paid for, but never graced. Miss Sally had feasted her eyes all through the sermon on her old acquaintance, admiring her fashionable thin black costume, and had looked curiously at the dark, handsome young man who came in late and stood beside her.

'But where was the other one?' she asked,

when she and Tobey had come out of church and opened their umbrellas. 'The one you spilled all the language about; Colin?'

'Writing a song, perhaps,' said the girl.

'In this gloomy weather?'

'Very likely. You know robins like to sing in the rain.'

'Well,' said Miss Sally, 'I'm cured of wanting to meet Em Battle again. She looks as if she'd lost her last friend, if you ask me, and that Duncan is hard as nails. I could see it.'

At intervals all the afternoon of the drizzly day Tobey had replied to the comments and questions of her guest, and, feeling quite restive after supper, it occurred to her that it would be a pleasant thing to call on Ann Lamont and fight the battle over again; perhaps tell her how she had obtained the article that had so pleased Uncle Bob. Tobey had visited this girl many times, and was quite at home in the boarding-house, about a mile distant, where Ann Lamont lived.

The weather cleared toward night and she enjoyed the walk and her pleasant thoughts.

Uncle Bob admired her prowess, and Colin Adair her musical taste.

Arrived at her destination, she had been there but a short time when Miss Lamont was called downstairs on some errand, and while she was gone Tobey went out to the drinking-fountain at the end of the hall. As she stood there she saw a woman come up the stairs. The young woman wore a close hat, but no veil. She was trim and slender, and as she turned on the landing Tobey saw that it was the Adairs' maid Ruth. She watched her open the door of the front room and heard her cry of pleasure, 'You here already, Duncan.' The rest was lost as the door closed. Tobey stood still for minutes, frowning at the fountain.

She went back to her friend's room and Miss Lamont, apologizing for her long stay, returned.

'What's the matter, Tobey?' she laughed, seeing a change in the face she had left wreathed in smiles. 'Seen a ghost while I was gone?'

'No; I was only thinking — wondering about a girl I saw whose face puzzled me.

You know how you will search your memory sometimes. Who are the people in the front room?'

'A Mr. and Mrs. McGregor. They haven't been here long and I haven't met them. I think they must both be employed, for Mrs. McGregor is never here by day. I've been a little bit curious about them myself. Sometimes in this open-window weather I hear scraps of their talk, if they get excited. They have a side window not so far from mine, and last night I distinctly heard her say firmly, "Not while your father lives."' Ann Lamont lifted her shoulders and laughed. 'I seemed to scent a family jar through the walls. Oh, no, you're not going yet, Tobey. It isn't late for a summer night. The boy is just going to bring us some ice-cream.'

So the initials that signed the telegram Miss Sally had reconstructed meant, to Tobey, Duncan Adair; but who was at large? What must Ruth watch for?

Tobey put aside these queries now, and, satisfying her cousin with a hasty résumé of her interview with Alec Wentworth, and

omitting Colin, she bade farewell to the reluctantly parting guest, and hurried downstairs.

'You kin get luncheon, Miss Tobey,' said the watchful Anthracite.

'No, I haven't time. I shall probably never eat again, anyway.'

'I wisht yo' wouldn't talk about starvin' yo'self,' he pleaded, as the girl vanished through the screen door and went down the steps.

'My, if there isn't Henry!' she muttered, waving her hand toward a cab coming up the street. There was a stand near the *Telegram* office and Mr. Bennett had happened to put her in charge of this special driver several times when she had to go far afield for a story, and they had become quite friendly.

'I'm so late this morning, Henry, I'll have to indulge myself,' she said as he drew up to the curb.

'I guess the newspaper folks are all busy this morning,' remarked the man.

'Have you heard about the murder already?' exclaimed Tobey.

'Yes, it's goin' around town like wildfire, not waiting much for the paper. I was interested 'cause I brought a woman home to that house last night about eleven o'clock myself.'

'You did? What did she look like?'

'You can't tell much what a woman looks like these days 'less you get her in broad daylight. Her hat was small, and pulled down the way they all are till eyes are about all you can see. She got out o' the cab and scurried around the house, as quick as a rabbit. If I'd known what she was going to do, I'd ha' asked her to think twice.' The cabman grinned at his young passenger, who was pausing to listen to him with her foot on the step, but he elicited no smile from Tobey.

'This is a terrible business, Henry, and I'm one of the people working on the case, so if you get hold of anything whatever to do with it you'll let me know, won't you?'

'I certainly will, Miss,' was the answer.

'And hurry,' she cried as she closed the door.

She met Jim Gaynes in the corridor near

the editor's office. He met her hurried advance with what she felt to be a most unfriendly look, although he chuckled with amusement.

'The chief says you want to have a finger in the Adair case. Ridiculous. Go home and play with your dolls.'

'I got the interview,' said Tobey defensively.

'Yes, and I suppose you'll live on that for the next six months,' was the contemptuous reply. 'To tell the truth, I ought to say at the inquest that you'd better be held up for manslaughter.'

Tobey's eyes widened.

'Of course,' he went on, 'that interview you're so proud of probably set the match to something mighty inflammable.'

Colin had implied as much. Tobey bit her lip.

'If things were as hectic as that, something would be sure to set the match,' she said with spirit.

'Well, say, you leave all this to me, little girl.' Gaynes's rough voice changed to his

idea of a caressing quality and he put his hand on the slender blue shoulder.

Tobey started back. 'No; I know the family and Mr. Bennett believes I can do good work on it.'

'Oh, yes, you know the family,' sneered Gaynes. 'You're just like the other girls, crazy about that coxcomb, Colin Adair, that's the size of it, and you want to be in it because —'

The eyes that could be so sparkling and gay fixed on the speaker with a gaze that flashed.

'Do you believe that Mr. Bennett would keep you on the paper if I told him that you insult me?'

Gaynes shrugged his shoulders. 'Oh, of course I know that you're the pet child, but you know I'm telling the truth.'

'I know that you don't hesitate in voicing vulgar personalities; and I'm not going to trouble Mr. Bennett at a time like this; but I am on his staff as well as you, and I am going to work on this case, so you go ahead and do your work, and I'll do mine.'

'Oh, well, now, don't get sore. I've been

at police headquarters all the morning and my story will cover the ground as far as it's gone. I don't mind telling you that the knife has been found.'

Tobey wanted to be close-mouthed; to have as little communication as possible with this odious person, but she launched one crusher as she pushed by him.

'I found it,' she said, and left Gaynes staring after her, open-mouthed, as she fled to the editor's office.

Mr. Bennett looked over his shoulder to view her excited entrance. Cheeks flushed, eyes, to say the least, emotional, she confronted him. He smiled at her and spoke quietly.

'Steady, Tobey, steady.'

'Yes, I know I must be, but, Uncle Bob, do you think my article Saturday could possibly have been the cause —'

'Nonsense. What put that into your head?'

'Other people have thought of it, Mr. Adair — Colin, and Jim Gaynes just now.'

'Oh, don't let him tease you. You don't mean to say Colin Adair taxed you —'

'No; he didn't mean anything unpleasant, and he wasn't blaming me because he knew, what I haven't confessed to you, that Mrs. Battle really gave me the interview, not Mr. Adair.'

Mr. Bennett threw his head back and laughed. 'Bully for Aunt Em!'

'I let you think I won him over because I liked to have you praise me; but he was savage to me.'

'Poor little Tobey.'

'Yes. I told you I won the Battle. She was sorry for my disappointment when she saw me crying. Think what a shame! A reporter, crying!'

'Oh, tears are very useful once in a way. I'm glad you know when to turn on the waterworks.'

Tobey's gravity was unbroken. 'You see I found a copy of that interview, torn across, under a bush near the house this morning, and it was left there by a woman who picked sweet peas there last night.'

'Oh, you know that!' Mr. Bennett, leaning back in his chair viewed the flushed face.

'Yes, we know that — practically. I found the knife this morning.'

'Found it!' The editor suddenly leaned forward, the lenient expression with which he had been regarding his protégée changing.

She nodded. 'Yes, in the garbage can. *A* knife, but it might not be *the* knife, you know. But it was horrid-looking.'

'Well, what did you do with this treasure?'

'Oh, the policeman there took charge of it, and reported it at headquarters. Jim Gaynes told me that the knife had been found.' A fleeting smile touched Tobey's lips as she said it, and the editor's eyes twinkled appreciatively. 'He was quite condescending, you know,' she added.

'Yes, I'm aware that Jim Gaynes rather resents children about the office. I hope you told him.'

'Yes, I couldn't resist.'

'Well,' Mr. Bennett gazed at her admiringly. 'You must have stirred up the Adair family somewhat.'

'They were very kind to me. Do you know Mr. Alec Wentworth?'

'Yes, Mr. Adair's lawyer.'

'He was the one who received me and gave me all the facts he could.'

'Then Colin came on the scene, and told you you'd done for his father —'

'No, no. He was distressed and thinking out loud and, of course, wondering in all directions. He didn't know' — Tobey paused and bit her lip — 'that I had in my bag that very minute the torn, soiled piece I found under the bushes, so it startled me — and then Jim Gaynes, just now —'

'Oh, nonsense, child. The act followed too closely on the interview. If a woman is going to be het up to the point of murder, she must have a little time to make up her mind.'

'It wasn't a woman, Uncle Bob. They all say she couldn't have had the strength to do what was done.'

'Have ycu found the murderer as well as the weapon? It wouldn't surprise me.'

'No; I won't even take the time to tell you the little I do know, for I must write my story —'

Here the telephone rang and Mr. Bennett

swung around to the desk and took it up.

'It's for you, Tobey,' he said. 'It's Henry the cabman.'

The girl took the receiver.

'I heard a little bit more, Miss Tobey. My pal, Jake, was driving near the Adairs' last night and saw a well-dressed man go into the alley. It was after eleven, and he took notice because there was a light at the corner and he thought it queer any one dressed so swell had on muddy boots and no hat.'

'Thank you, Henry. This is important. Bring Jake up here as soon as you can.' She hung up.

'Are you beginning to have a theory, little sleuth?'

'No,' she said ruefully. 'How do people ever solve these things? But we shall do it' — with a suddenly courageous tone. 'I've always believed I could. Here's my chance, and I'll do it if it takes years.'

'All right; I'm eager for your story. Go ahead. When is the inquest to be?'

'To-morrow at ten o'clock. I shan't sleep to-night.'

'Oh, that's a poor way to begin on a job you're going to give years to.' Mr. Bennett patted the girl's shoulder and went back to work.

CHAPTER VII

THE INQUEST

The inquest was held in the spacious reception hall of the Adair house, and when Tobey went in, she involuntarily looked toward the velvet-covered bench where yesterday she had sat with Colin. The men who filled it now were four of the six jurors who had already viewed the body of Douglas Adair at the undertakers'.

Her roving glance noted Mrs. Battle, Duncan and Colin Adair, Alec Wentworth, Jenkins, Tom, the cook Araby, Dr. Cooper, Ruth, the cabman Henry, his pal Jake, and some strangers.

Several policemen and newspaper men were present, among them Jim Gaynes, who made it obvious by his grin that he was vastly amused by Tobey's presence. She could feel the indignant flush that mounted to her hair as she met his eye.

As Tobey's glance swept about, her eye

was caught by Mrs. Battle, who indicated a seat near herself, and the girl obeyed the signal. She could feel Jim Gaynes's ironical gaze upon her movements, and Mrs. Battle, noting her deep flush, and understanding somewhat her excitement in the situation, extended a kind hand and held hers an instant, as the girl slipped into the chair beside her. Alec Wentworth looked across at her with kindly recognition. Tobey glanced rather timidly at the bereaved sister, whose composed regard, showing no sign of grief, was fixed on the coroner.

Furtively her gaze wandered on to Duncan and Colin seated on the other side of Mrs. Battle. The dark-browed elder brother looked stern and repellent; the younger face still had the absent, introspective appearance of yesterday, and he was very pale.

'Poor boy,' thought Tobey, 'he is too sensitive. Still suffering because he was a disappointment to his father, and it is too late to change and please him. As if he ought to have pleased him! Mrs. Battle must persuade him that he was right; must convince him.'

Her heated thoughts were interrupted by the voice of Jenkins, who had been called and was giving again, in detail, his finding of his master's body.

This, of course, was public property. Tobey's story in the *Telegram* had also told of the mysterious woman picking flowers in the warm, still, evening hour.

The doctor gave his evidence, corroborated by Mrs. Battle, who told the story of her last evening with her brother. The coroner then turned to the cook.

'Your name is Araby, I believe.'

'Yes, sir.' The black eyes shone in the cocoa-brown face. Araby was so expansive with innocence that she yearned to talk. 'I done tole yo' yisterday, I'se in bed at nine o'clock Sunday night, an' I'm mighty glad I was 'cause I'm skeered o' bad cha'acters.'

'Then you saw nothing of the strange woman, picking flowers?'

'No, sir; that was Mandy, the cook at Ca'away's. She see her plain when she come to the fence to try to get me. Sometime we go walkin' evenin's, but I'm mighty —'

'You were the only one of the servants at home?'

'I guess so, but, anyway, Mis' Battle and Mr. Adair was home alone, so Mis' Battle she said she'd get their Sunday lunch an' I could go out; but I jes' went to bed. I'm kinder heavy on my feet —'

'Was it you who identified this knife?'

The coroner produced it and Araby's eyes rolled as she viewed it.

'Yes, sir, but so did Jenkins.' Araby did not want all of that fearsome responsibility. 'Many's the time Jenkins has helped me in the kitchen when I was extra drove, an' sliced bread or meat with that knife. We both 'ud know that handle anywhere; but I ain't teched it for days, 'cause it hain't been home.'

'Oh, you knew it was stolen, then?'

Araby bridled, and it was evident that if she could have turned scarlet she would have done so. 'Stealin's common in this house,' she said scathingly, and for a second directed her gaze full upon Tom Brogan. 'I've been that ill-convenienced losin' the very thing I wanted to lay my hand on —'

'You know who stole that knife, then? You should have told at once. Tell it now.'

The coroner scowled accusingly at her, and Araby, suddenly limp with fright, stammered, 'Oh, lawsy, Mr. Coroner, I — I didn't see him do it — and, anyway, who'd ever think of him usin' it on our poor gentleman, an' — an' I was in bed, ye know, an' — an' didn't know nothing about anythin'. *I don't know nothin' about anythin'!*' With the loud repetition Araby flopped into a chair and threw her apron over her face.

The coroner turned to the gardener. 'Jenkins, I'll hear what you have to say about this.'

'Not very much,' said Jenkins, visibly flustered, and studiously looking away from Tom Brogan. 'Araby was in a terrible way 'cause her pet knife was gone and I've thought sometimes that Tom — I've thought folks took little things and hid 'em in the toolhouse till a — till — till a time they wanted to use 'em.' The latter implication was so awful that Jenkins gave one fearful glance at Tom Brogan and met a murderous stare.

'But it was your duty to keep the tool-house locked, wasn't it?'

'Yes, sir, and I was so very pertikeler I couldn't see how it came that the winder was open Monday morning' — perspiration was visible on Jenkins's forehead — 'but it come over me in the night last night that Saturday I had to go away and I left the lockin'-up to somebody else, and Sunday we don't use the house, so I didn't notice the winder —'

'Who did you leave to lock up on Saturday?'

Jenkins swallowed. 'Well' — he hesitated — 'I asked Brogan to do it. He — he locked the door fine.' Jenkins dropped into his seat, and his mouth was dry. He felt Tom's eyes upon him.

The coroner turned away. 'Miss Ruth, tell us where you were on Sunday evening.'

The pretty girl started at the sound of her name. She was white and there were dark circles around her eyes. Tobey felt a cold resentment as she regarded her. She could hear again the sweet cry of joyful greeting,

'You here already, Duncan!' A girl who ate the bread of this household, while disgracing it. She glanced at Duncan, still dark, stern, repellent. He was regarding Ruth with no change of expression.

'I spent the evening at the home of a friend,' said the maid in her quiet, refined voice.

'What time did you return?'

'About eleven o'clock.'

Tobey glanced across at the cabman and he returned the look.

'Alone?'

'Yes.'

The coroner turned to where the two cabmen sat. 'One of you brought a lady here last night.'

Henry nodded, touching his forehead.

'Was this the young lady?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'What time was it?'

'Eleven o'clock.'

'Surely you saw her when she paid you?'

'She didn't pay me. A young man sent me for her, and he paid me.'

'Where did he send you?'

'To a house in Jennings Street.'

'Do you know who the man was?'

'He's sittin' over there.' Henry jerked his head toward the Adairs.

Tobey's eyes shone. She saw Colin's lips tighten, while his look remained downcast.

'He knows,' she thought acutely. 'That is why he spoke so curtly to Ruth yesterday.'

'Which one was it?'

'The dark gentleman.'

Tobey surprised the questioning look on Mrs. Battle's face as she looked at Duncan, who did not move a muscle.

'Where was Mr. Adair when he gave you this order?'

'On the street. He told me to go to the number on Jennings Street where a lady was waiting for a cab and bring her here.'

The coroner turned back to Ruth, whose cheeks had hung out a crimson flag. 'When you reached here, Miss Ruth, did you linger in the garden to pick flowers?'

'No.'

Tobey found herself able to stare at the

girl now with the dispassionateness appropriate to a sleuth.

'What did you do?'

'I went into the house, and as I passed the door of the servants' sitting-room the butler James called me and told me there was a telegram for me and he had put it on my dresser. Then I went up to my room.'

'You heard no noises in the house — no disturbance?'

'None whatever.'

'Do you recognize this?' The coroner suddenly reached under his table and brought out a blood-stained handkerchief. The girl leaned forward to view it, then started back, her hand up against her mouth, and gazed at the bit of linen with stricken eyes. It had rather large initials 'R. V.' embroidered in a corner. Apparently she could not speak.

'Is it yours?' asked the coroner.

'No — no,' she uttered breathlessly, still staring with horror.

'The murderer used it to wipe the knife,' said the coroner, 'and threw it down beside the body. If it is yours, that is no sure sign

that you were the one who used it, you know.'

'No, no, it's not mine!' gasped the girl, so white and near to fainting that Mrs. Battle put a detaining hand on Duncan's arm as he started to rise.

'What do you know about the handkerchief? You evidently know something,' pursued the coroner.

'Indeed — indeed, I don't' — the girl's voice was scarcely audible. 'It is — there's — blood —' Ruth sank into her chair and some one opened the window beside her.

Tobey's cheeks were crimson now. She looked across at Jim Gaynes, whose eyes were glued to the bit of blood-stained linen. She had recognized the handkerchief. It was her own, and but for Gaynes's innuendoes she would say so now.

She knew that he would be sure to find another text for his repulsive jokes if she told that Colin had had her handkerchief.

How different this white, harassed boy from the flushed, happy musician who had stuffed the handkerchief into his pocket one evening without a thought of its owner. How

did it happen to be in the library that night, and why should the accidental likeness of its initials to Ruth's own so completely unnerve the girl?

She remembered Ann Lamont's quotation of her neighbor in the front room, 'Not while your father lives.' Tobey asked herself if she were sufficiently suspicious of Ruth Valentine. Perhaps it meant more to her than at first appeared, to get Douglas Adair out of the way. Duncan was infatuated. Perhaps Ruth felt that he would marry her if it were not for that dominating father.

But the coroner was calling upon Duncan. The young man spoke stiffly, in a low voice.

'I spent Sunday evening partly in making a social call and partly at the office. It was a little before eleven when I reached home.'

'Did you note anything peculiar about the house or grounds when you came in?'

'No; everything was quiet.'

'Did you retire at once?'

'No, I sat up and read for about half an hour.'

'And still heard nothing?'

'Nothing.'

'Had your father any enemies, Mr. Adair?'

'Perhaps so. I believe no successful business man escapes.'

'But do you know of any who might have had a motive powerful enough for murder?'

'No. Of course we have searched our memories seeking such a person.'

'What do you know about your father's latest will? Do you know whether he has made one recently?'

Duncan hesitated noticeably before he proceeded. 'My father did make a will on Sunday and had it witnessed by the cook and butler.'

'What was the reason for this?'

'My father was a law unto himself,' was the response.

'Do you know the terms of that will?'

Duncan moistened his lips. 'I have not seen it,' he returned.

The coroner turned away.

'We'll hear now from the under-gardener, Tom Brogan. What do you know about this matter, Tom?'

The low-browed, shifty-eyed man stood, and spoke with sullen defiance. 'I know I've got enemies in this house, that's one thing I know. No one here ever gave me a fair deal but Mr. Adair himself. He was my friend. He hired me. He knew what he wanted, Mr. Adair did, and he wanted Tom Brogan.'

'Where were you Sunday evening?'

'To a movie.' Tom's eyes ranged around the room and he cleared his throat. 'But before I ever went there I heard somethin' that had the movie beat. It was Mr. Adair quarrelin' with somebody. They say he didn't have no enemies!' The rough voice took on a scornful tone.

A thrill went through the room. Tobey could feel the rigidity that stiffened the body of the woman beside her.

'Tell us what you heard.'

'He was roarin' somethin' awful and callin' names and tellin' somebody never to come inside his house again.'

'And you didn't know who he was talking to?'

'I didn't at first — but I had to go by

there, anyway, and they was in the library, so I turned my head to the crack in the shade —'

'Well,' the coroner exclaimed crisply, as he paused, 'was it any one you knew?'

'I'd seen him lots o' times,' mumbled Brogan gruffly.

'Well, out with it.'

'It was Mr. Colin Adair.'

A vibration seemed to start every pulse in Tobey's body beating. Her burning eyes sought Colin's and he looked toward her, and saw again that yearning confidence that would envelop him. Mrs. Battle's hand started out toward her beloved nephew and withdrew itself. Duncan frowned and his strong jaw set tighter, but he still kept his eyes down.

Tobey's interest in sleuthing waned sickeningly. Her thoughts worked with lightning speed. She wished she had strangled the intrusive cabman who had seen a fair-haired youth with clay on his boots going up the alley late at night. To her even a shadow on Colin was unthinkable, keen pain, and there were people in this room now, perhaps, who

were looking on him with sudden suspicion. She glanced at Jim Gaynes. He was tense. There was silence for an appreciable moment, then the coroner spoke.

'Go on about your own affair, Brogan. You say you went to a movie; and where from there?'

'I went to a soft-drink joint,' responded Tom. 'I knew I wouldn't get no fair play here, so I brought along the two guys that was with me. Hi, Joe! Hi, Mike!'

Thus adjured, the two individuals called upon rose, twisting their hats. One of them spoke hoarsely.

'He wuz there and we wuz.' They then relapsed.

'The murder was not committed until near twelve o'clock. You didn't stay there drinking until twelve o'clock?'

'Well, suppose I didn't,' said Brogan sullenly. 'I can prove I was in bed then. My wife bawled me out for bein' late, and one o' the boarders kicked 'cause I sang while I was undressin'.'

'Singing at that hour of the night,' re-

marked the coroner. 'You must have found something unusual at that soft-drink parlor. You did; and where did you go after leaving there, before you waked up the boarder?'

'Where? Oh, walked around some, I suppose.'

'Yes,' said the coroner, 'you walked over here.'

'What would I do that for?' blustered Brogan.

'You know best. Your finger-prints were on the tool-house window.'

'Well, why not?' Tom lifted his big shoulders uneasily. 'I worked around the tool-house.'

'You know that a blood-stained knife was found. Your finger-prints were on the handle of that knife.'

At this Brogan grew a deep red and blustered louder than before. 'Oh, I've got enemies in this house.' He cast a glowering look on Araby, who quailed. 'That cook would 'a' had me fired long ago if she could, but Mr. Adair, he knew me, he —'

'That's enough, Brogan. No need of so

much noise. You took the knife from the kitchen, didn't you, and hid it in that tool-house?'

'Who says I took the knife?' The man's face was working. He didn't know that it was the presence of other finger-prints besides his own at the tool-house window, and on the knife, prints that were duplicated on the library table, and that belonged to no one in the house, which were puzzling the police now.

'But it would help your case,' said the coroner, 'if you should confess —'

'Confess nothin',' broke in the man, plainly shaken. 'I ain't done nothin' to confess.'

'Don't interrupt me. If you would confess that when you left your friends after the soft and hard drinks, you came over here, crept quietly to the tool-house window, in search of a knife to take home to your wife; got in through the window and found the knife had gone — some one else had taken it —'

Brogan looked up quickly. 'And if I did? What then?'

'It might account for that doubtful half-hour. You have it to account for, you know.'

Tobey continued to gaze at Brogan with a sinking heart. He had opened a vista of terrible trouble, humiliation, and grief for Colin. She visualized the scene between the hard Scotchman and the son of a gentle mother.

How Mrs. Battle must have suffered! She could understand her set composure now, the lack of grief in her face. Who could grieve for Douglas Adair?

Tobey's own testimony was brief, confined to the finding of the knife. It took all her self-control to give it. Colin, *Colin* had been laid liable to the insult of suspicion by the crowd present. His private griefs dragged before Jim Gaynes and his like.

CHAPTER VIII

COLIN ADAIR

She was still aching from the realization, Jim Gaynes himself was fixing her with that hateful, ironic, knowing grin which he reserved for her, when her attention was snapped away from him in a trice.

The coroner was calling the most charming name in the world.

'Mr. Colin Adair.'

As the young fellow rose, he glanced at Tobey. The look that met him was alive with defensive pride and unshakable confidence. Intense sympathy with him moved the girl. His carriage, his clear, direct regard, his superiority to every one else in the room, all were so obvious, that she had to work for an impersonal expression; an effort made more difficult by the fact that Mrs. Battle here reached into her young neighbor's lap, and, without turning her head, took one of her hands and held it firmly.

Tobey wondered what the action meant. Was it sympathy for her, or a need of sympathy for herself, since Tom Brogan's cruel revelation had made public a private grief?

Colin was answering the coroner's inquiry as to his movements Sunday evening.

'I spent the night at the house of my uncle, Alec Wentworth.'

The coroner turned toward the lawyer and Mr. Wentworth nodded his head.

'Did you know of your father's new will which he had made that day?'

'No, I did not.'

'Did the quarrel with your father occur practically as Brogan told it?'

'Yes.'

'You went to Mr. Wentworth's because you had been asked to leave?'

'Yes.'

'What was the cause of your father's anger?'

'My determination to adopt music as a profession, when he was equally determined that I should be a business man. I had tried to fit myself to his wishes, but without

success; so, an advantageous prospect coming up for me in the musical line, I determined to take my stand with my father on Saturday. An interview with him had been published that afternoon in the *Telegram*, an article which disturbed him greatly.' Tobey winced and Mrs. Battle pressed her hand.

'He was much irritated and my aunt tried to dissuade me from speaking to him just then in consideration of his state of mind; but I felt the time had come.' The steady voice stopped for an instant, then went on: 'Mrs. Battle, feeling certain of the outcome of our interview, took most of my possessions from my room into hers; and next morning, on her way to church, she brought them to me at Mr. Wentworth's. Certain compositions and manuscripts, which I valued very highly, were missing. I knew they had been left on or about the piano.' Mrs. Battle here released Tobey's hand and turned still further toward her adored nephew, feeling with every beat of her heart what this public ordeal was to him and proud of his calm domination of it.

'My father had forbidden the household all communication with me, and I feared that he might find this valuable material and destroy it, so I was anxious to get possession of it immediately. My aunt and I arranged that on that evening she should get my father upstairs early, and leave one of the French windows in the library open so that I might come in at nine o'clock.'

Tobey listened with painful attention, keeping her eyes downcast. The steady voice continued: 'Mrs. Battle undertook to keep him occupied for an hour, giving me time to sort out my music from my sister's, for it was much confused. I came across the wet ground around to the back of the house and made my entrance, leaving, I suppose, the clay tracks that Jenkins noticed.'

Another pause, then the voice went on:

'I had worked for about half an hour when in the hall above I heard my aunt talking loudly to my father and I knew it was a warning to me. It seemed afterward that Father was coming downstairs for a forgotten parcel in the hall, and not going into the

library at that time, but at Mrs. Battle's signal I gathered my things together, shut off the light, and went out the window. This time I took a short cut through the alley to Mr. Wentworth's apartment on a back street, several blocks away. I sat up talking with him awhile and then went to bed.'

'He is your family lawyer?' remarked the coroner.

'Yes.'

'He drew up the new will, then?' The coroner looked toward Alec Wentworth, who shook his head, waving a hand toward the witness.

'No,' replied Colin. 'My Uncle told me that he had been called in that morning to make a new will, disinheriting me, and he had refused. He begged my father to take time to consider, but Father would not listen, and announced that he intended to make his will without the assistance of a lawyer.'

The white-faced speaker paused.

'Do you think your father feared that he should die? Do you think he had any premonition of death?'

'No. He was in good health.' Colin's voice grew fainter.

'What, then, do you think was his great haste?'

'It was characteristic of him. He was very angry with me and he wished to act quickly to cut me off.'

Mrs. Battle and Alec Wentworth corroborated this view, and Colin sat down.

Tobey saw Jim Gaynes and the man next him whispering; saw Gaynes write something on a slip of paper and pass it to the coroner. She watched the latter read it. Then he looked up and called Jacob Cobb.

The whispering man next Gaynes rose. It was a clutch at Tobey's heart. That detestable Jim Gaynes was going to use her own witness against Colin.

The cabman cast a look at the pretty reporter who yesterday had been so keen for his testimony and had run it in an extra for the afternoon paper. He encountered a frozen face with staring eyes.

Prompted by the coroner, Jacob Cobb stated that between eleven and twelve on

Sunday night he had been driving past the street light at the corner of the alley that ran behind the Adair house, when he saw a man go into it.

'What kind of a man?'

'Young, and a swell by the look of his clothes. That's what made me look twice. It was a queer time of night for his sort to be running up an alley without any hat on.'

'Running, was he?'

'Well, hurrying, anyway. I stopped the car to look, and I wondered, 'cause I could see plain his shoes was covered with clay and I guessed he'd been hurrying out of a puddle.'

Tobey's heart seemed to stop. Not for herself the excitement. These people sitting here, people who didn't know or care that Colin was a fine-strung instrument, incapable of discord; they were listening eagerly, greedy of every word. Every drop of blood drained out of her face.

'What did the man look like?'

'I couldn't tell that, except that his hair was light. He seemed about the size and build of the young feller who just spoke.'

With another plunge of Tobey's heart the blood streamed back into her face. The cabman sent her a triumphant look. He was sure that he had scored once again with that pretty reporter.

'Did you see the man come out of the alley?' asked the coroner.

'No. After a bit I drove on. It wasn't any o' my business what he was so keen after.'

'That will do. Mr. Colin Adair, I'll trouble you once again. You say you went to bed at Mr. Wentworth's quite early.'

Tobey's heart was choking her. She kept her eyes down.

'Then you know nothing of the fair-haired man in the alley at midnight.'

'Yes, I was the man,' said Colin. He stated it in a voice not quite so steady as it had been. 'I took another look at my music before I went to bed and found that a few sheets of manuscript, necessary to my operetta, were missing. They had been dropped, perhaps in the library, perhaps in the yard. I ran back through the alley and searched the yard with-

out finding them. The library was lighted and I didn't venture nearer.'

One of the jurors was frowning curiously at him as he closed. 'You didn't go into the house?' he asked.

'No.'

'You didn't even go up on the veranda to see if your father was in the room?'

'No.'

'You suspected that your father was going to disinherit you?'

'Yes, Mr. Wentworth had told me that was his intention, but, knowing my father, I had expected nothing else.'

Tobey wondered that the steady gaze meeting the dissatisfied juror did not shame him into silence, but he was grumbling something.

Colin continued simply: 'It didn't matter to me. Freedom to lead my own life in my own way was more to me than money.'

The coroner spoke again: 'It is strange that you should not have gone up on the veranda and at least looked into the lighted room.'

'No — no, I couldn't,' exclaimed Colin with a sudden sharp note of aversion.

'Why was that? Did you, for any reason, have a fear of foul play?'

'Yes,' the young fellow seemed suddenly preoccupied as with a memory. 'No,' he added hurriedly, 'no, not foul play.'

'What deterred you then? Fear *of* your father, or for him? You are not being clear. Mrs. Battle locked that window by which you left earlier in the evening, at ten o'clock. Had you known she was going to do so?'

'I — I hadn't thought about it, but of course she would lock up.'

'Your father's murderer must have been already in the house when she did that.'

Colin moved restlessly.

'You saw the library lighted and yet you were not sufficiently interested even to go up the steps. What held you back, I ask. Was it fear of your father, or for him?'

'No — no, assuredly not either one. I' — the witness colored visibly — 'I just decided quickly to wait till another day.'

'What did you do?'

'I went back to Mr. Wentworth's and went to bed.'

'Leaving the library lighted,' said the unsatisfied juror, 'and your father dead in his chair.'

Colin had sat down, his eyes dropped, and he did not reply to this. Tobey, her heated thoughts seething, looked up and caught Jim Gaynes's eye. He did not grin this time, and his expression was tense. 'He would hang Colin if he could,' she thought.

She did not hear the coroner's next words, but the inquest was adjourned and the members filed out from the cool, dim hall into the summer sunshine.

Mrs. Battle detained Tobey. Her pleasant face was deeply flushed. 'My dear, don't go. If you can spare the time I wish you would lunch with us.'

'Mrs. Battle, are you quite sure — quite sure that it would be agreeable to — to the family to have an outsider here to-day?'

'You are no outsider. Alec' — as the lawyer was passing her — 'I am asking Miss Tobey to stay and have lunch with us.'

The smiling lines around Mr. Wentworth's eyes crinkled. 'A capital idea. What we need

now is some light conversation. We need some one of the humming-bird variety who can flit lightly from flower to flower of speech.'

At the moment Tobey looked far from able to fill the bill. Her dark eyes were wide and piteous as she lifted them to his kindly ones.

'I don't think there is any general conversation left in me,' she said; then she lowered her voice. 'All I feel fit for is a game of twenty questions.'

The lawyer nodded, and Mrs. Battle gave her a troubled smile. 'Never fear, Miss Tobey,' said Wentworth, 'that will come later. Meanwhile, you must eat, so eat with us. We like to look at you.'

The last of the assembly were drifting out of the open door. Duncan and Colin had disappeared. Tobey stood alone with the two older people, for whose kindly attitude she felt grateful. Her story in yesterday's *Telegram* had been as full as she could make it. She had written it with avidity. To-day all eagerness had fled. The only spur that gave her willingness to continue her expositions

was fear of Jim Gaynes, who, in his vicious jealousy of Colin, would be sure to do all he could to excite public opinion against him.

'I thought I should enjoy working on this sort of case so much,' she said — and she could not hold her voice steady — 'but I find it — all very different.'

Alec Wentworth smiled. 'You thought they would be chessmen, and you find they are human beings.' Tobey saw Mrs. Battle's lips tremble. 'Never mind, Miss Tobey,' he went on. 'Play the game.'

'I'm going to play the game, Mr. Wentworth.' She looked up at him with renewed determination. The very thought which kept recurring to her with a fresh pang, that Colin's part in this might not stop with the stern heartlessness of his father, gave her added firmness. It was no longer a case; it was her case.

If she should testify that Duncan Adair was keeping up a separate establishment with the maid Ruth, it would turn the tide of suspicion from Colin, and, in connection with Ruth's collapse at sight of the bloody hand-

kerchief, rivet attention on her. To Tobey's youth and inexperience there was something so mean, so nauseating, in the situation between Duncan and Ruth that she felt like concealing, rather than revealing it, because it concerned Colin's brother; but that consideration would be brushed aside if necessity arose to defend Colin.

She would not reveal it yet, however. She remembered the surprise of Colin's sudden and irrelevant burst of praise of his brother, as they had sat together in the hall yesterday. Her cheeks grew warm at the thought of associating Duncan with Ruth in her story. No, she couldn't do it. Colin might hate her for it.

Mrs. Battle was watching her preoccupied face. 'I think I should like to have you stay,' urged the lady. She gave a little, whimsical smile. 'I did you a favor, once upon a time, you remember.'

'Oh, Mrs. Battle' — Tobey put an appealing hand on the other's arm — 'have you regretted it? Do you think it had anything to do with what happened? You know I found

a piece of the interview under the vines where that woman stole the sweet peas.'

'Poor woman' — Mrs. Battle gave a little pensive shake of the head — 'I'd steal them, too, if I couldn't get them any other way.'

'But do you think,' persisted Tobey, 'that I shouldn't have done it? Some people say — Colin said —'

Mrs. Battle's soft exclamation was like a laugh. 'Oh, "Colin said" — yes, I know, he was beating about for a clue and it seemed to him that his father would not have been so irritated by the publication if there hadn't been something in his life he wasn't willing to publish, and that involved enmity somewhere with some one. It was very far-fetched, my dear. We did not betray anything of a disagreeable nature in that interview, and we have nothing to regret. *Now*, will you stay to lunch?'

'Do you think' — Tobey looked from Mrs. Battle to Mr. Wentworth and back again, 'do you think Colin will tell you why he didn't come into the house that night?'

'Why,' said Mr. Wentworth, tossing his

head, 'nobody need make a mystery of that. Some one had lighted the library again, and of course Colin figured that it was his father. He knew what a poor sleeper his father was. It is no wonder, then, that he wasn't keen to go browsing after flying sheets of music around a volcano liable to erupt.'

'Do you believe that?' asked Tobey.

'Certainly; don't you?'

'No,' returned the girl, the sleuth dominating the lover.

'Why not?'

'Because he is so honest, so direct, he would have said just now that he shrank from rousing his father again.'

'Then what was the reason?' returned the lawyer. 'What do you think, Em?'

Mrs. Battle shook her head. 'I don't know, but he will tell me, of course.'

Tobey felt the singular self-possession and peace in this woman of many trials. She was still in the shadow of tragedy, but she had come into a harbor, safe from treacherous rocks and storms. For years her nephew Colin had been the central interest of her life.

Just as he was on the point of being rent from her, the reprieve had come. The confidence, respect, and admiration she had once felt for her brother had, if Miss Sally's dark insinuation had been correct, long been shaken, if not destroyed. His coarse treatment of Colin's mother, and the suspicion of overreaching and unscrupulousness in business matters, had left her with the bare bones of duty to be performed toward him. She was like a sturdy swimmer, resting after a struggle. Even the morning's public revelation of humiliation to her darling had not gone deep enough to disturb her long. The nine days' wonder would soon be over, and if her boy was disinherited it might be all the better for him.

She now gave an understanding smile to Tobey. The girl had found a criminal case easier to get into than to pull out of; and Mrs. Battle knew it was going to be hard for her to write her story to-day. Colin's experience with his father had all come upon Tobey as an absolute surprise and Mrs. Battle felt instinctively that because of the girl's admiration for him it was going to be highly distasteful to

her to make copy of it. Well, why should n't Mr. Bennett's protégée be a little 'crazy' about Colin? Mrs. Battle suspected that she was, and just as she felt sympathy for the woman who stole the sweet peas, so she would feel for any young girl who wanted to steal Colin. How could a discriminating girl help it?

Tobey explained that if she were staying to lunch it would be a case of 'eating and running,' and this being agreed to, Mrs. Battle led her to a little breakfast-room just outside the dining-room where she might find an easy-chair or a desk, and books in plenty to amuse herself for half an hour. There was a linen-covered divan there, set under the windows whose casement curtains were blowing gently against the screens. Tobey, left alone, stretched herself out upon it, and gave herself up to thought. Almost at once she heard a voice outside. It was a refined voice with clean-cut words, spoken very low.

'Why, Tom Brogan, are you here?'

'Why not, I'd like to know?'

'I thought you would go right away.'

'Without what's comin' to me? I guess not.'

Any ethical training Tobey had received regarding eavesdropping was thrown to the winds. She raised her ear to the level of the window-sill, against the soft curtain, and listened intently. Brogan's gruff voice was lowered.

'There may be a great deal coming to you that you don't expect,' went on the woman's voice. 'Why didn't you tell what you were doing here at midnight?'

'The coroner said I was here. I didn't.'

'But you were. I saw you from my window. You passed under the light and came across the grass.'

'What are you after?' — roughly. 'Do you think I did it? Do you think I'd bump off the only friend that I had in the place?'

'I suppose that I ought to have told that I saw you.'

'Told! Now look here, Ruth, I've treated you square. You made me promise to hold my tongue and I have. I haven't even told your Aunt Mary that you were here, living in this house.'

'Aunt Mary knows it.'

'She does? Then I've got the closest-mouthed wife in the world. Back in Centerville she could talk fast enough. Mr. Adair knew she could and that's why he liked to keep Tommy good-natured.'

'Poor Aunt Mary,' burst from the girl.

'You ought to have "told," eh?' The rough voice rose scornfully.

'Sh! Sh!' came from the other.

'How about yourself? Since when did a splash o' blood on a handkerchief give you a spasm. P'r'aps *I* ought to ha' told. Pretty soft for you to have Douglas Adair out o' the way. You think I'm blind in one eye and can't see out o' the other.'

'Tom, please hush!' the imploring voice seemed nearer. The girl must have approached her irate companion.

'Well, I ain't, I'll have you know, and when you nearly toppled over, Mrs. Battle held onto that big stiff that's sweet on you to keep him from runnin' across the room. You needn't think you're goin' to get away with that so easy. There's a lot more comin' to

you; but what's the use o' huntin' so far away for the murderer?' he added after a vicious pause. 'Ain't motive what they're huntin' for? You had a motive, perhaps, but that feller who wanted to get in in time to keep his father from makin' another will, he had the biggest motive of all. What more do they want?'

A smothered cry from the girl preceded silence, and Tobey knew Ruth must have fled.

A tie between these two was amazing. Ruth's Aunt Mary was this rough fellow's wife. Why had the girl bound him over to secrecy about herself? Probably she was ashamed of any connection with such a person, but she could not have used that argument in securing his silence.

So Tom Brogan had entered these grounds at midnight on Sunday. Could he have committed the murder? If he did, what connection could have made the sight of the 'R. V.' handkerchief so paralyzing to Ruth? Douglas Adair had evidently been under some sort of blackmail from Tom Brogan. It was unlikely that the gardener could have

gotten as much advantage by killing the goose that laid the golden eggs as by letting it live.

The mention of Centerville had galvanized Tobey. Mrs. Brogan had been back in Centerville. The sleuth spirit rose in her eagerly. The clue was so hopeful that it made the girl the cheerful companion at lunch for which Mr. Wentworth had hoped.

Mrs. Battle drew Colin inside the library as he came from the stairway on his way to the dining-room.

'I've asked Miss Tobey Vincent to stay to lunch with us.'

'All right,' said Colin.

She looked into his pale, tight-lipped face.

'How this horrid morning has taken it out of us!' she said wearily.

'Yes, it's all in a lifetime, I suppose. It's darned near humorous, though, that they want to convict me for killing poor old Dad. I thought being kicked out was bad enough.'

'Oh, they fasten on everything so eagerly. Tell me why you didn't come in, that last time, Sunday night.'

Colin looked down into her eyes, while she

waited, questioning. 'I can't,' he said at last, to her amazement.

'Then Tobey was right. She said if it had had anything to do with your father you would have told.'

Colin's pale lips smiled. 'H'm. That's an awful sweet girl,' he remarked.

'She is, and clever,' replied Mrs. Battle. 'I know she was sick this morning over discovering what your father had done to you, and I know she would rather run away than write her story for the paper this afternoon. Poor child, she thought a criminal case was going to be so wonderful.'

'Well, why not?' asked Colin calmly.

Mrs. Battle's gray eyes snapped at him. 'Because you're not a chessman,' she said crisply.

'H'm. Afraid for me?'

'Not she. It's a harder game than she expected, but she's going to play it; and I tell you the child, I believe, is a fighter.'

'She's a mighty sweet girl,' repeated Colin listlessly.

'Then you won't make it easier for her by

telling why you wouldn't go into the house that night?'

'No.'

Mrs. Battle took hold of his shoulders and gave him a shake. 'How easily you could have given the reason of not wishing to disturb your father again! Why did you want to make a mystery of it?' She looked up and he looked down. 'Was there a skunk on the step?' She wanted to break the blank whiteness of his look, and he did give an unhappy laugh that was audible in the dining-room, where Tobey and Mr. Wentworth were waiting. Duncan had gone back to the office.

'How good your laugh sounds!' said Tobey as the others entered.

Colin approached and took her offered hand. Gravity, white, wretched, settled upon his face again. 'When shall we wake from this nightmare, Tobey?' he asked.

'When we find the criminal,' she answered brightly, her eyes eloquent of her belief in him.

'I thought I was miserable when we talked yesterday,' he said between his teeth, 'but

it's a thousand times worse to-day.' The boy was still holding the little hand that gripped his close. 'There's one thing I can't bear, and I seem to see it coming. If Ruth Valentine murdered my father, she will get us both, for it will kill me.'

His head dropped, and Mrs. Battle, surprised by his intensity, came near and put her arm around his shoulders.

'Colin,' she said soothingly, 'my dear Colin. Girls often become hysterical at the sudden sight of blood. No woman murdered your father, dear. Don't let that scene mean anything to you.'

CHAPTER IX

THE DRUG-STORE

Alec Wentworth took upon himself the burden of that period at the luncheon table. Each of the four people present tried to eat and failed signally; but of the four Tobey was the most anxious to get away where she could think and write. She felt that Jim Gaynes would present the events of the morning to make them as prejudicial to Colin as possible, and she wanted her story to offset his if she could. The way would be to stress Ruth's amazing collapse, and there certainly was no consideration owing to Ruth Valentine.

One great help she hoped for. It would take the wind out of Jim Gaynes's sails. When the ordeal at table was over, Mrs. Battle went with her guest to the door.

'Did you ask him?' said the girl anxiously.

'Colin?'

'Yes; did you ask him why he wouldn't go up on the veranda that night?'

'Yes, but he wouldn't tell me.'

'Oh, what a pity! I wanted it so for my story. People like to think the worst, and it sells the paper so, they will —' Tobey's eyes swam, and Mrs. Battle stooped down and kissed her cheek.

'Yes, I understand, dear, but we know he is innocent.'

'Yes, and everybody in this town is going to know it before the week is out.' Tobey's eyes dried and her lips set firmly.

'Do you see a way, child? Colin will be a nervous wreck if he allows himself to brood so over this. The whole thing coming together is terribly hard on his pride, of course, but he amazed me coming down on poor Ruth like that.'

Tobey shook her head. 'He didn't amaze me. I've been searching hard to discover a *reason* for this crime; and, Mrs. Battle, if I could find out why the maid was so unnerved by that handkerchief — find out what thought, what horrible fright, leaped into her mind at sight of it — I should be on the track.'

'I might talk with Ruth,' suggested Mrs. Battle.

'Not for the world.' Tobey seized her arm. 'Don't say a word to put her on her guard. I have a plan.'

'Well, good luck to you, little girl.'

Mrs. Battle spoke sadly, and with a pressure of the hands they parted.

Tobey dreaded to meet Gaynes at the office, but she did not find him there. She wrote her story and then, consulting the address which Jenkins had given her yesterday — only yesterday, and it seemed a month past — she hurried out of the building and taking a trolley car rode toward the outskirts of town. That one word, Centerville, spoken by Tom Brogan, had kindled a spark of hope which she was impatient to follow.

Leaving the car she entered a corner drugstore, and, as she went in by one of its entrances, she saw Jim Gaynes going out by the other. Was his errand the same as hers? She stood near a window to watch his movements with keen anxiety. Was he going to the Brogan house, or had he been there? If

the latter, it would be likely to make her errand a wild-goose chase. But she exulted, anyway, for if Gaynes had thought best to make this excursion, then she, who had so far more reason than he, was not making a mistake. She watched him closely and the drug clerk followed her eyes.

'That feller that went out just as you came in; he was asking for the Brogan place. I thought he might be a reporter after Tom, 'cause the paper yesterday spoke of him being a servant at the Adairs'. Mean job, knifing that old gentleman. The inquest was to be this morning, I noticed.'

'Was it?' responded Tobey, and the clerk rebuked himself for talking of such matters to this big-eyed little girl, but she kept those big eyes on Jim Gaynes.

'Which is the Brogan house?' she asked.

'There, he's coming to it now. Third from the corner.'

They saw Gaynes run swiftly up the steps, ring the bell, and a woman in a checked gingham dress answer it.

Gaynes passed in and Tobey lifted her

childlike, innocent eyes to the clerk and spoke timidly. 'Do you know Mrs. Brogan?'

'I'll say I do,' was the response. 'I board there.' Tobey's query was put with the appealing, trusting manner which she understood using to advantage, and the reaction to which in either men or women was a desire to pick her up and kiss her. The clerk examined her admiringly from her neat hat to her little low-heeled sandals, reflecting upon how very pretty blue looked on girls, especially on some girls.

'You board there? It's a boarding-house then. Oh —' Tobey started in spite of herself, for Gaynes came out of the house again and they could hear the door slam after him.

'I'll bet he was a reporter,' remarked the clerk with a laugh. 'Mrs. Brogan is some peppery.'

Tobey's heart sank. If Jim Gaynes, with all his experience had failed, what chance had she? She watched him run down the steps, and started as she saw his long swinging strides cross the street. He was coming back to the store! Instantly she flashed past the

amazed clerk, dived behind the opposite counter, and, with a finger on her lips, dropped out of sight. The man's mouth was still open as Jim Gaynes pushed in at the screen door.

'Give me a Robert Burns, will you?'

The clerk turned to the cigar counter. 'Nothing doing at Mrs. Brogan's,' went on Jim. 'I applied for board, but she's full. Pretty good place?'

'Yes. Very decent table. Good as you could expect for the price, especially when anybody has such a tough time as she does.'

'Oh, widow, is she?' Gaynes lighted his cigar and lounged against the counter.

'No.' The clerk smiled. 'Do you know, I'd figured you for a newspaper man. I don't know why. I thought you were going to Brogan's after Tom. She isn't a widow, but she might as well be. She's married to a worthless cuss. She's the man of the family.'

Gaynes smiled and looked at his cigar.

'Why should I be going after Tom if I was a newspaper man?'

'Oh, only that he's one o' the Adair folks.

I saw he was quizzed with the other servants. I'm waitin' now for the *Telegram* to read the account of the inquest. I hope they find the feller that did it. They don't seem to get anybody these days.'

'They'll get him all right,' said Gaynes quietly, 'and they won't have to go far, either.'

At the opposite side of the store, crouching low, a sick heart was beating fast. If the wretch dared to poison people's minds!

'Have you heard that anybody's suspected?' In his eager interest the clerk for the moment forgot his stowaway.

'Well,' began Jim lazily, 'it's getting to be pretty well known that Mr. Adair had a fierce quarrel with one of his sons just lately.'

Grim lines formed about Tobey's mouth. Yes, everybody would be reading that in an hour, but it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. She was going to save him.

'Which one?'

'The younger. The mountebank, the singer, the player of pretty tunes. A lady's man.' Tobey stuffed her handkerchief into her

mouth. 'Douglas Adair didn't want a thing like that around.'

'Well — you think —' Gaynes's listener was open-mouthed.

'Only what everybody will think — the boy saw it coming that he was going to be disinherited, he was already kicked out of the house, so —' Tobey could feel, though she couldn't see, the shrug of heavy shoulders. 'What would a man naturally do in the excitement? He has refused to account for himself during the hour that the murder took place.'

'Great Scott!' The clerk frowned. 'I wish the *Telegram* would come. If they know the son did it, why isn't there an extra?'

'Ta-ta,' said Gaynes indifferently, pulling himself up straight and moving away. 'If I get board later at the Brogans', I'll see you again.'

The clerk looked after him, cogitating over the repulsive situation the stranger had indicated. In a small city like this everybody had some interest in the most prominent families and the Adairs were set on a hill in

the mind of even this humble citizen. One of those two sons murder his father! What a fearful tragedy!

Tobey waited for a long minute after the slamming of the screen door, then she appeared above the counter with the suddenness of a Jack-in-the-box. The startled clerk jumped.

'If I didn't forget you, Miss!' he exclaimed, and then wondered if he really remembered her right. A little girl with large soft eyes and an appealing manner had vanished from him. This girl's eyes were black and her lips hard.

'Was—was that feller a friend of yours?' he asked rather timidly.

'No, an enemy — and a liar!'

'Oh! He said some pretty tough things.' The young man's startled regard as he gazed at her made Tobey realize that her present make-up was not a desirable one for her errand across the street.

'I'm waiting for the *Telegram*,' continued the clerk, as his visitor came out into the store.

She tried to smile at him. 'I suppose you

know we're told not to believe everything we see in print.'

'But the account of the inquest —'

'Yes, it will be there, but there will be more than one probably. You look for the column signed "R. T. V." The writer is a friend of mine and I happened to see it before it went to the press. It is a true account.'

'You don't believe, then, that the son —' he hesitated.

Tobey shook her head and tried to look timid and demure and childlike, and succeeded only in resembling a very good-looking accusing angel with an immaculate bob. Her hat had fallen off and she had it in her hand.

'No one who has brains and stops to think will believe that,' she answered. Then she startled the clerk again by shaking hands with him.

'Thank you for your kindness,' she said, and eclipsing her head as far as her ears with her hat, she passed out of the screen door just as the paper boy brought in the awaited *Telegram;* but her puzzled host did not unfold it at once. He went to the window and

watched the little blue figure cross the street at the corner, move along the sidewalk until she came to the third door, and mount the steps.

'Say what you please, there's something doing at the Brogans',' he muttered. He waited and watched the checked gingham dress again answer the bell's summons, and still, while he unfolded the paper, he kept his eyes fixed on the door through which Tobey had disappeared, waiting for her ejection.

'She said that writer's story was true. Then that must mean she was at the inquest herself. Why didn't I get her to tell me —' Curiosity could no longer be restrained. The Brogan door remaining closed, he sat down behind the counter and read the newspaper.

CHAPTER X

A BLESSED BLISTER

When Mrs. Brogan answered Tobey's ring, the girl's quick impression was of a forbidding face with a permanent frown. It was easy to look large-eyed and wistful, for that was the way she felt. The woman must not send her away. She was tempted to slide through the grudging opening of the door, but better sense prevailed.

'May I come in and take off my stocking?' she asked simply. 'I've a blister on my foot, and there's a wrinkle. There isn't a hotel or any place around here where I can go in.'

Mrs. Brogan's frown deepened, but the request was so timid, the suppliant so young.

'Why did you pick on this house?' she grumbled.

'Because I knew you kept boarders. One of my friends takes meals here, so I knew you entertained strangers, and I just imagined

you would be kind enough —' Tobey's smile and appealing eyes finished.

'Oh, well —' The door opened wider and the visitor lost no time. 'I don't know where I can take you. I let the parlor yesterday.'

'Mayn't I go out in the kitchen? Probably you are busy there this time of day.'

'I s'pose so.' Mrs. Brogan closed the door and a little five-year-old girl came into the narrow hall, peering at the stranger. There was soot on her face and on her pink apron. 'Go back, Polly.' Mrs. Brogan pushed the child before her and Tobey followed after, thankful to the rough darn in her silk stocking which had chafed a spot on her foot.

When she reached the kitchen Polly created a diversion by tripping over a stick of wood and falling against the corner of a chair. Her shrill cries rent the air, and Tobey noticed that there was no jerking or impatience in the way her mother picked her up and set her on her feet.

'You can take this chair over by the window, Miss,' said the careworn woman, mechanically patting the pink-aproned shoulder.

Tobey obediently removed the offending chair, while the howls lessened, and seating herself, pushed off a sandal and began unrolling her amber silk stocking. She cast a smiling glance at Polly, whose surprise at seeing the pretty lady begin to undress at the family hearth gradually diverted her into quiet.

Mrs. Brogan went back to the sink and proceeded with the peeling of potatoes for dinner, while Tobey industriously vamped Polly behind her back. The child slowly moved over toward the welcoming blue figure. Her mother saw the movement out of the corner of her eye.

'Don't bother the lady,' she said.

'She won't bother me. Come here, Polly. Do you want to try on my shoe?'

The little bare feet came slowly nearer and a belated sob caught in the child's throat.

'Do you want I should give you any water for your foot?' Mrs. Brogan half turned.

'Yes, if you will — in that cup beside you, please. I'm going to put a bit of paper over the spot. It will help keep the stocking

smooth.' Tobey had her arm around the child now, and took the offered cup with her other hand. 'Polly, will you give me a piece of that paper behind the stove?'

'It's — it's kingling,' vouchsafed Polly, hoarse from tears.

'Yes, you have a nice lot of kindling, have n't you? Will you bring me that top piece?'

Mrs. Brogan watched to see if the child was equal to the errand. The sweet-voiced young girl with the bare pink foot was evidently sure she was, and the mother's face softened as Polly dragged the top paper from the pile and brought it over to the window and was rewarded by a sounding kiss on her cheek.

'Better wait till her face is washed,' remarked the mother.

'Oh, she's sweet enough for me,' said Tobey. 'I see your work-basket, Mrs. Brogan. May Polly bring me the scissors?'

Indeed, this kitchen was evidently a living-room, with every evidence of all its owners' occupations. Clothing was hanging on the wall in one corner, only half concealed by a curtain.

'That's one thing Polly can't touch — the

scissors,' said Mrs. Brogan, bringing them herself.

'This paper isn't anything you want to keep?' asked Tobey glancing down at the sheet in her lap as she took the scissors. Douglas Adair's face was looking up at her.

The chronic cloud on the woman's face, which had lightened, observing Tobey's manner with the little one, deepened again.

'No. That picture's about the last one I'd want to keep,' she said shortly and turned back to the sink.

'You didn't admire Mr. Adair, then. I read that article about him myself. It sounded as if he was a pretty fine man.'

'Ye-es, it did' — the voice was bitter. 'It made me sick.'

'Now, Polly,' said the visitor brightly, 'your mother doesn't care about this paper, so see what I'm going to do with it.' Folding the paper carefully she did some dexterous cutting with the scissors, Polly watching with keen attention.

'Now what do you think you'll see when we unfold this?'

'Don't know.'

'Well, what would you like to see?'

There was no hesitation: 'A dolly.'

'Then look.' Tobey unfolded the paper, and lo, a long string of little girls, their hands joined, were dancing on the air, their skirts spreading gayly.

Polly, kept on short rations of entertainment in the harassments of her mother's life, clapped her hands. 'Mamma, Mamma!' she cried joyfully.

Mrs. Brogan turned and, as she watched the child whose little hands were joined to each end of the dancing figures, while she capered about the floor, a smile touched the corners of her lips.

Tobey, allowing no waste time to elapse before the renewal of her subject, plastered a wet piece of paper over her blessed blister and pulled on her stocking while she talked.

'Of course, every one is interested in the Adairs just now since the tragedy, and if you feel that way about Mr. Adair it shows that there was a side of him that the townspeople here don't generally know.'

Tobey's heart beat quickly. That interview, the woman said, had made her sick. Had it driven some one else to murder after all?

Polly was quietly standing her string of dolls against the wall and Mrs. Brogan returned to her potatoes.

'Of course you know of the tragedy, Mrs. Brogan?'

'Humph! I know.'

'Did you know of any one who hated Mr. Adair?'

'That I did,' was the short response, 'and more than one, too. When I heard of it I didn't know but what Dave Ayres had spunked up enough to come over from Centerville and do the job.'

Mrs. Brogan's voice was hard, and Tobey prayed to know how to proceed so circumspectly as not to make her close her mouth. She was pouring the water off the potatoes through a strainer.

'I know the family did live in Centerville once,' said Tobey as indifferently as she could manage.

'Ye-es,' drawled Mrs. Brogan wearily.

'Was Dave Ayres somebody who was wronged by Mr. Adair?'

'Oh, not much. Only stole his invention. Dave didn't have money enough to fight and prove it; the old Scotch fox was too clever for him. It crushed Dave; it was his life-work.'

'How sad! How dreadful!' Sincere feeling thrilled through the girl's voice.

'Dave was the patient sort. He got up after a while and went at something else, but his wife —' deeper bitterness sounded in Mrs. Brogan's voice, and she paused; 'she was my sister and she brooded over it till she lost her mind.'

'Oh, Mrs. Brogan!'

'Yes. Worse than dead, she is; and folks bow down to the man who did it all.'

'Not now. Didn't you feel you ought to come to the inquest and tell this?'

'No. What do I care? Nothing will bring my sister back to me.'

Tobey saw the quick movement of the woman's hand as she brushed it across her eyes. The girl felt that in her heart she was saying that Tom was at the inquest and he

knew it all — and that Ruth was there. This suffering woman was Ruth Valentine's Aunt Mary. For a wild moment Tobey longed to tell her of Ruth's actions at the inquest; she might be able to throw a broad stream of light on the girl's behavior.

Tom had said that back in Centerville his wife had talked enough. Tobey could see now that Tom must have been in some way a henchman of Douglas Adair at the time the sordid tragedy took place.

'More dollies, more dollies!' cried little Polly, leaving those against the wall and running up to her new friend.

'Yes, indeed, dear, you shall have some more,' said Tobey. She had decided definitely what her next step should be, but she restrained her impatience and went on with her dexterous cutting until the cabbage-scented kitchen was alive with wreaths of dancing children, with the delighted human child in their midst.

'Thank you very much for your hospitality, Mrs. Brogan,' she said at last, as she rose to go.

'I guess Polly's thanking you,' was the response, as Mrs. Brogan turned from the sink, and at that moment her husband appeared in the doorway. As he saw Tobey, he scowled and paused.

'How do you do, Tom,' she said composedly.

'What you been tellin' her?' he asked his wife roughly.

She turned toward the young visitor with quick suspicion.

'I know Tom,' explained Tobey, a wave of pity going through her for the wife of such an animal. 'I know the Adairs and have seen him there.'

'The young lady has been very kind to Polly,' said Mrs. Brogan.

'All right. What did she come here for?' He asked it in his characteristic stupid, sullen manner.

'What's that to you?' retorted his wife.

'Did she tell you she was a reporter? I'll bet she didn't.' Tom glowered at the girl out of the tops of his eyes. 'She came spyin'. I'd like to know what you told her.'

Mrs. Brogan's harassed frown turned to Tobey, whose genuine sympathy looked from her eyes. Moreover, Polly, loath to have the visitor depart, came and clung to her skirt and Tobey put her arm around the little neck.

'Yes, I am a reporter, Mrs. Brogan,' she said gently, 'and I knew you came from Centerville where the Adairs used to live, and I hoped you might tell me how people there regarded Mr. Adair. I thank you for the information you have given me.'

'What information?' Tom blurted out.

'Nothing that will do you any harm,' replied the girl. She turned back to his wife, who stood doubtful and suspicious, but who was finding it difficult to resent the gentle young creature to whose hand Polly was clinging.

'You know the inquest was held this morning, Mrs. Brogan, and as no conclusion was reached, it has been postponed to Thursday. I hope you will influence Tom to finish his testimony.'

'Oh, cut that!' was the rude interruption.

'My wife knows I was home Sunday night, late.'

'Yes, late and noisy,' agreed the woman bitterly. 'Why? Is Tom under suspicion?' She asked it impersonally, and added with scorn, 'He hasn't got the nerve to do a thing like that.'

'He hasn't explained what he was doing over there at the time of the murder.' Tobey looked directly into the shifty eyes.

'I wasn't over there. The coroner claimed I was, but his guess don't prove anything.'

Tobey gazed until she caught his eye. 'You were there between eleven-thirty and twelve,' she said slowly. The shaggy eyebrows lowered. 'You were seen by a member of the family who hasn't testified to it yet.'

Tom shuffled his feet. 'If you did it, Tom,' said his wife with faint interest, 'you showed yourself more of a man than I suspected, and I guess David Ayres could defend you. What you here for so early? Been fired?'

Brogan shook his head and Tobey disengaged herself from little clinging soiled hands.

'I thank you again, Mrs. Brogan, for your kindness' — she turned the eloquence of winning smile and eyes upon her. 'My foot really was chafed. I'll darn my stockings more carefully next time. Don't trouble — I can find my way out.'

In the street she caught a car going toward the office. There was a sound-proof telephone booth there, a haven for which her heart had been longing for some minutes.

CHAPTER XI

LONG DISTANCE

Could it be, after all, that Tom Brogan was the guilty man? Could it be that something more than stupid obstinacy prevented his being frank about that midnight visit? Or was it the habitual dishonesty of a petty thief which made him unwilling to admit that his errand had to do with stolen goods secreted in the tool-house, especially with that sinister knife? If it could be proved that he was the criminal, there would be no more sickening embarrassment for Colin. This consideration made Tobey tolerant of meeting Jim Gaynes when she entered the office.

'Got it all doped out, little girl?' he asked, looking up with his exasperating, patronizing grin.

'Well,' she returned, showing no annoyance, 'I've gained one step. Tom Brogan *was* at the Adairs' that midnight. One of the family saw him from a window. I'm not at

liberty yet to say which one, but it is a fact. Perhaps the police ought to know.'

'They certainly should. I'll attend to it. I've gained one step, too. The maid has skipped.'

'Ruth?' Tobey's voice betrayed her excitement.

'Ruth. It'll make a good streamer headline, but I'll bet dollars to doughnuts that it has nothing to do with the case.'

'What makes you think so?'

'Got a hunch; and, say, you're a good friend of Colin Adair?'

'Wouldn't anybody be at this time?'

'Well, you'd better talk to him before Thursday. Tell him this isn't a game of Pussy-wants-a-corner that we're playing. He's testifying in a trial for murder, and he wants to mind his *p*'s and *q*'s. Did you ever hear such a line of childish talk as he gave us there at the last?'

Tobey put a strong restraint upon herself. 'It was very mysterious.'

'It was a lot of blah, that's all, and if he thinks it'll get him anywhere he's mistaken.

Does he know, does he realize that if he'd confess, it would be all to the good for him? Lots of provocation and all that sort of thing, you know. A big case could be made for him.'

Tobey was pale and her throat so dry she had to wait and swallow before she could speak. At last she managed an utterance.

'How fast you go! Haven't you overlooked something in your eagerness? How about Ruth and that handkerchief?'

'Oh,' Gaynes shrugged his shoulders. 'That class of person. A splash of blood, especially connected with a murder, gives 'em hysterics every time.'

'How could the police let her go? I thought, of course, she would be under surveillance. I'm sure Brogan is.'

'Yes, he is.' Gaynes smiled. 'I guess they know they can put their finger on Ruth as long as Dunc Adair doesn't try to slip away.'

'Mr. *Adair?*' Tobey drew herself up and spoke in a cold tone of amazement.

'Oh, yes,' Gaynes nodded. 'Little birds flying around tell lots of interesting things. Duncan will know where she is.'

Tobey turned sick again and, if there is such a thing as a mind-wave striking its victim, Ruth Valentine, wherever she was, must have reeled. It will be noticed that Tobey followed the way of the world. Why should not Duncan Adair have received the shock of her displeasure? No, he was Colin's brother. Of course, he was a snared victim. It was the girl with the regular features, the refined voice, and the good manners who had been the guilty party, and still was. Tobey felt certain she understood what lay behind Colin's passionate outburst of grief.

'I have to run, Jim,' she said. 'I have some telephoning to do.'

'Well, remember what I said about Colin Adair,' Gaynes called after her as she was making her escape.

She reached her desired haven in the telephone booth, closed the door, and put in her call. Mrs. Brogan's information had set in motion recollections of certain remarks of Cousin Ann Sally and she felt she should get confirmation of what she had been hearing concerning Centerville. She succeeded finally

in locating Miss Sally and never had she supposed that that lady's accents would fall on her ear like such music.

'Why, Tobey!' shrieked Cousin Ann Sally joyously. 'How good of you to call! How about the inquest? I'm dying to hear.'

'Not finished yet. Adjourned until Thursday. Please don't speak so loud, Cousin Ann Sally. It echoes so, it's hard to hear. I want to ask you some questions. Did you know a David Ayres in Centerville?'

'Yes. He's the one I told you said Douglas Adair stole his invention — some new way to make wire. Did he kill him?' — very excitedly. 'Say, Tobey, did he?'

'No, no. Speak softer, Cousin Ann Sally. Tell me more about it.'

'Why, only that he didn't have money enough to fight Adair and prove his rights. You must have seen Ayres when you were a little girl in Centerville. You probably went to school or Sunday School with Ruth Ayres.'

Tobey was listening tensely. Ruth — Ruth Ayres. Something clicked in her brain

and she located at last the resemblance that had always haunted and eluded her each time they met. She remembered the little 'widow's peak' always so pretty on Ruth's fair forehead.

The excited voice in Centerville went on: 'Most people sympathized with the Ayres, but, of course, there's always folks that want to keep in with a rich man and the war came on and Douglas Adair made piles of money. Dave suffered and so did Ruth, but neither of them so badly as Mother Ruth — Ruth Valentine she was — and a fine woman; but she couldn't rise above it. She brooded till she lost her mind, poor thing, and had to be put away. Oh, it was sad.'

'Did you know a Tom Brogan?' asked Tobey.

'Oh, that half-wit that Ruth's sister married? I heard about him, but never saw him much. I just knew he was a helper to Dave Ayres, and people used to say that Mr. Adair took him over with the invention. I guess he got a pretty poor bargain for once in his life. Life's full o' mysteries, and one is why Mary

Valentine wanted to take up with that pinhead. You will keep me posted, won't you, Tobey? It's all I can do not to take the train this minute.'

'I promise you I will, Cousin Ann Sally. I'll call you again on Thursday, after the inquest. Good-bye.'

Tobey hung up. The atmosphere in the closed booth that summer day was not conducive to thinking, and she must think.

So there was plenty of reason for Ruth Ayres to hate Douglas Adair. He had robbed her of her mother, and robbed her father of his wife, and the fruit of his brains. Had she committed the murder? If so, would a jury agree that the provocation was sufficient?

When Anthracite opened the screen door to admit Tobey, he gazed at her with concern.

'Miss Tobey, yo' look like you was walkin' in yer sleep. You didn't ought to work so hard in hot weather. What did happen this mornin'? I ain't had a chance to see the paper yit.'

'A lot of people talked, but nothing was decided. You shall have my paper in a

minute. They're going to go on with the inquest Thursday.' As she spoke, Tobey unfolded the paper she carried; she felt utterly unequal to reading Jim Gaynes's column, and she didn't need to read her own. Mechanically, from long habit, she glanced over to where current crimes and casualties were recorded, and, tearing out a paragraph for her scrapbook, handed the paper over to the eager boy. Her mind was elsewhere.

'Is anybody using the telephone?' she asked.

'Yes. Mis' Buzzard went in — must be fifteen minutes ago. She must be out in a minute. Do set down, Miss Tobey. Your forehead looks like yer brains was workin' awful hard.'

Anthracite was a mind-reader. Tobey's brain had never worked with more concentration. It seemed that every minute brought some new consideration or recollection to shed one more ray of light on the absorbing subject.

An old lady with a thick gray transformation emerged from the telephone booth at the

back of the hall, scarlet in the face and fanning herself vigorously. Tobey greeted her, then slipped into the booth, and called up Mrs. Battle.

'This is Tobey Vincent, Mrs. Battle.'

'Yes,' came a voice, a depressed, sad voice, different from that lady's crisp tones.

'Excuse me for disturbing you; you sound tired.'

'I am tired. The 'phone has rung all the afternoon. Every reporter in town has seemed to want to tell me that Ruth has gone away, as if I didn't know it and didn't miss her all the time. She always took care of the 'phone. They all want to know why she has gone, and, to tell the truth, I want to know, too.'

'Didn't she leave any word?'

'Not a scrap. So unlike Ruth. She was always so considerate.'

'I'm very sorry, Mrs. Battle. I wish —' Tobey was about to offer herself impulsively for the position of companion until Ruth's return; but the fact that she would so like to be under the same roof with Colin, and that

his aunt might suspect the fact, restrained her. Also that pallid, horror-struck face of Ruth rose up before her again with the suggested grim possibilities that the talk with Miss Sally had revealed.

Ruth Valentine did not belong to 'that class of persons' to which Jim Gaynes had so contemptuously referred in explanation. Tobey's thoughts had flown back to the events of that far past that was only two nights ago, and that evening was foremost in her mind now.

'Mrs. Battle, may I be one of the reporters to ask you a question? Only I'm not a reporter any more; I'm a detective with her whole heart in the job.' A sudden determination seized the girl. She would not ask this question over the telephone. Her talk with Miss Sally had started her on a new track, and putting two and two together had brought her to feel that the question might be vital.

'Surely you may, humming-bird,' came the tired voice.

'I'd rather ask it in person. May I see you for a minute?'

'Certainly. Come over in about ten minutes.'

Tobey came out of the booth, her cheeks scarlet, her eyes shining.

Anthracite met her, the paper clutched in his brown hands. 'This reads awful interestin', Miss Tobey. Looks to me like it was one of 'em.'

She winced and a line came in her forehead. 'Oh, let's not make up our minds, Anthracite,' she said quickly.

He looked up at her knowingly. 'But I think you made up yo' mind, Miss Tobey. I always look at R. T. V. She's an awful smart writer.' The boy showed his ivories and shook his head with the rakish white cap. 'I'd rather 'twas her, too.'

'Why?'

''Cause it couldn't be Mr. Colin Adair; not a man that looks like him. He'd be sheik if he was in the movies.'

'Oh, no.'

'Yes, Miss Tobey. He's got that walk when he goes down the street. He's plumb stylish. Now the other Mr. Adair, he'd be a good villain.'

'I never heard of a good villain, Anthracite.'

'Yessum, he's all dark an' piercin' with his eyes. He could stick a knife in easy if he was mad, but the paper don't accuse him o' nothin'.' The boy gave the sheet a rather disappointed glance.

'They haven't found the criminal yet,' said Tobey gravely.

They could now hear a boy passing the house crying 'Uxtry.' Tobey gave the little darky a coin and he plunged down the steps and ran up again with a paper damp from the press.

Tobey's lip curled as she looked at the headline.

THE MAID RUTH VALENTINE
HAS DISAPPEARED FROM THE ADAIR HOME

SUSPICION INCREASED

'There!' Anthracite's black eyes sparkled. 'You see, you was right. You're sure smart.'

The paper was not the *Telegram*. Jim Gaynes's hunch as to Ruth's innocence had

not been shared by those who were not so set on proving Colin guilty.

She left Anthracite luxuriating in the possession of his two papers and went up to her room to powder her nose and wash the hands to which little Polly Brogan had clung. She glanced out of her window at the Adair garden in the height of its summer beauty, before the dust and wilting of midsummer should give Jenkins the unremitting care of preserving its freshness.

It was a gracious and beautiful home from which Colin had been banished. He was there now, but how long could his adoring aunt keep him, she wondered. Disinherited, his disgrace made public, under a cloud, and perhaps in real danger. Tobey clasped her hot cheeks as she looked down at the diamond drops showering from the fountain. He must be persuaded to be frank about that midnight visit. Mrs. Battle had failed to persuade him. Probably Mr. Wentworth had tried, but she herself had not talked to him. Perhaps she would see him now, in five minutes, and get her opportunity. She would not

worry Mrs. Battle with Jim Gaynes's repulsive forebodings, but the situation was serious. Either Colin must make a clean breast of his movements that night, and prove the truth, or she, Tobey Vincent, *must find the criminal.*

She threw her hat on the bed, and, looking alertly fresh, ran downstairs, past Anthracite, still engaged in his literary labors, and out of the house.

'It looks to me, Miss Tobey —' the words followed her as she ran down to the street.

It was now five o'clock and she walked around the corner and up the Adair steps. To her great surprise it was Duncan Adair who opened the screen door to admit her.

'Aunt Em sent me to meet you, Miss Vincent,' he said by way of greeting. 'Come into the living-room; she will see you in a few minutes.'

Cousin Ann Sally had said that Duncan Adair looked hard as nails. He certainly looked grave and troubled as they sat down near together.

'I am sorry to disturb —'

'No, no disturbance,' he said quickly, and then met Tobey's inquiring glance with a smile so irradiating, so transforming, that the girl regarded him in wonder. Of course, if he had looked at Ruth like that! After the thoughtful, smiling pause he went on, 'Aunt Em seems to have fallen in love with you.'

'How kind!' was all Tobey could offer.

'I'll spare your blushes and not tell you all her cogent reasons, but they have to do with the delicate way you have handled our tragedy, your attitude to the family, including herself, and your love for flowers.' With the finish Duncan's quick smile flashed again and faded. His quiet manner was reposeful. He seemed so much nicer than he was!

'It is kind of you to tell me this.'

'May I add without fulsomeness that my Uncle Alec is in the same boat with her?'

Tobey bowed her pretty wavy head, and maintained her gravity, praying that he would not feel obliged to specify further. How could he be so composed and self-possessed with boys crying 'Extra' and accusing headlines coming out about 'Mrs. McGregor'?

A revulsion of feeling swept over her. She stirred with resentment of the dark, handsome face and his attitude of power.

'Perhaps Mrs. Battle would rather —' she began.

'No, she is coming, but I want to speak to you first about this morning.' He paused a moment, then went on, 'My brother Colin, Miss Vincent, is the finest fellow in the world.'

At the sudden statement color flamed up to that pretty bob and again the reporter-detective took refuge in a dignified bow.

'You know by the revelations of this morning that he has been through a terrible strain. He is just the quality of boy to be wrenched through and through by Father's violence, and his extraordinary reticence about Sunday night irritated me very much.'

Tobey leaned forward, her hands clasped in her lap. 'Then when I found that my aunt and my uncle had tried separately and together to get him to tell the truth, and he persisted in refusing, it — it startled me.'

'How do you mean — startled you?'

'Made me afraid the strain had been too much. His reason didn't seem to function.'

'I know it!' exclaimed Tobey. 'He must have known that he was putting himself in danger.'

'He would know it if he were normal, but that is what worries me. He isn't normal. He doesn't seem to know it, or, if he does, he doesn't care, and that is just as bad.' Seeing Tobey's apprehensive glance about, the young fellow went on: 'Don't worry. He isn't in the house and we can talk freely. You seem a very young girl to be working on a case like this.'

'No, no,' returned Tobey. 'I'm not very young — I'm twenty and I've always wanted to —' She leaned back and suddenly her lips quivered.

'Yes. Aunt Em said you'd had the ambition a long time.' The soft, girlish face was struggling for control. 'It isn't any fun, is it?' Duncan's smile expressed understanding sympathy.

'You see, Miss Tobey, perhaps, what I'm coming at.'

A pause during which the girl regained calm.

'I'm not sure.'

'Well, it's this.' Duncan lowered his voice still more. 'It looks as if perhaps Colin doesn't tell what he did after he came into the grounds to look for his music because *he doesn't know.*'

The two gazed into each other's eyes. Tobey clasped the arms of her chair until the fingers whitened. 'Well, Mr. Adair?' she said at last.

'If Colin didn't know what he was doing' — a long pause — 'then we don't know what he may have done.'

Duncan spoke slowly, letting the words drop one by one. Tobey's hands crept over her heart. An inarticulate sound came from her lips.

'He behaves strangely — all the time — as if he were distracted. Of course, the event might be expected to distract him — but — if he didn't know what he was doing — and — and — will he ever remember?'

'Mr. Adair you must suffer in such thoughts. Have you spoken to Mrs. Battle?'

'No, no. Aunt Em has enough to bear.'

'You mustn't dream of such a thing. Remember how smoothly — in what a wonderfully controlled way he gave his testimony up to that moment.'

'Yes, but the law will insist.'

'Certainly we must try to induce him. Even if we could only get him to confess that he doesn't remember. Perhaps he failed to say so this morning because he didn't think the coroner would believe him.'

'But he knows we should believe him,' said Duncan, seeming to take comfort from this idea. 'You must stay till he comes, Miss Tobey. Aunt Em wants you to. She feels that when he meets us three here together, the result may be different.'

Tobey, for all her brave front, felt unnerved. She saw the picture of that fair-haired man running up the alley and into the grounds and finding the surprise of the brightly lighted house with its unlocked entrance —

Perhaps he did run up on the veranda, and saw his father sitting in his armchair, and

was seen. Perhaps the old man met him with a curse — perhaps —

'You are very pale, Miss Tobey, but I can't regret speaking. I am soul-sick thinking, thinking! When a man is so deeply in love, has given his heart so completely away as Colin has' — the pause Duncan made was but an instant, yet, as has been proved, an instant of time is sufficient for one to experience the incidents of an elaborate dream; Tobey felt the earth give way under her feet, saw life a blank before the next words — 'why, one is inclined to believe all these theories of the therapeutic value of music. I've been feeling that, whatever is the truth about this crime, I must get Colin away to a sanitarium. The frank, gay boy has changed into an utterly different person and I feel the only path back will be in some way through his music.'

Here Mrs. Battle pushed aside the silk portières and came into the room. Her worried, careworn face lighted at the sight of Tobey. The girl started up and met her.

'Little humming-bird,' said Mrs. Battle

and kissed her. 'There, there!' she exclaimed, glancing through the window, 'Colin is coming. I think that together we are going to get him to speak.'

CHAPTER XII

THE BROTHERS

Colin ran up the steps and in a minute entered the room. In the light of all Duncan had said, his appearance startled Tobey. Wild, white, he did, indeed, look distracted as he stood, a newspaper in his hand, and frowned as he looked from one to another.

'Where have you been, dear?' asked his aunt. 'You look as if you had tired yourself out. Do you see, Miss Tobey is here?'

Colin gave the girl a short nod.

'Come and sit down,' continued Mrs. Battle.

For answer he held out the paper. 'Have you seen this?'

'No.' Mrs. Battle took the paper and looked at the headline and sighed heavily. 'Oh, I wish she hadn't gone away. This repulsive publicity!'

'Don't you think it was the wisest move she could make after her exhibition this

morning?' Colin asked it bitterly. 'Let Dunc see it.' Mrs. Battle passed Duncan the paper and Colin gazed frowning at his brother. 'He ought to have some pretty decided ideas on the subject.'

Tobey's heart beat fast watching the challenging, hostile look. Duncan scanned the lines, then raised his eyes till they met the burning ones in the white face.

'Yes,' he said at last, 'it was unfortunate that she had to go.'

'Had to go!' mocked Colin. 'Yes, it is generally considered unfortunate to commit a murder.'

Mrs. Battle was frightened at the mirthless sound accompanying this, and his excited manner.

'Colin, dear, don't be cruel. You don't know Ruth or you wouldn't —'

'Do *you?*' He turned on her fiercely. 'Do you think *you* know Ruth? No, but Duncan does.' He glared at his brother, who was standing, his dark face calm as he met the hostile gaze. 'Why do you suppose the police are letting a suspect like that go? It is

because her lover will know where she is.'

Mrs. Battle's lips opened and closed in bewilderment, and she looked piteously at the excited boy.

'Duncan Adair isn't going away.' Colin spoke through closed teeth. 'Believe me, they wouldn't let them both go.' He turned back to his aunt. 'You wanted to know why I wouldn't come back into the house late Sunday night. It was because the library was not the only lighted room. The room above it, Duncan's, was ablaze too; and close to the window stood Duncan, and your maid came up to him and he took her in his arms and kissed her. I saw it,' Colin swallowed, 'and I couldn't see anything else. I forgot everything. I ran from the place. Duncan, that I'd always looked up to; in your house; with your servant! I was sick.' Colin choked and his voice stopped.

Duncan was by his side in an instant. 'Colin, dear old boy,' he said with deep concern, throwing an arm around his brother, and, though the younger stiffened and attempted to draw away, that smile of Dun-

can's, seen through a mist, affected him. 'Ruth and I have been married for a month. Forgive me, Aunt Em. If I'd had as much sand as Colin has, I should have told sooner; but I knew Father would be furious, and I put off the evil day.'

'Duncan Adair, I'm speechless!' gasped Mrs. Battle, divided between amazement and relief that the mystery of Colin's movements was solved.

Tobey was tense. She could enjoy Duncan's smile now. To think that little Ruth Ayres, with the widow's peak on her pretty forehead and the two brown plaits down her back, had married Duncan Adair!

'Sit down, Colin, and let me tell you,' went on Duncan.

'Shall I go?' cried Tobey, half rising.

It was Colin who held her. 'Stay, please. What secrets have we from you?' He said this with a look which instantly went to that corner of Tobey's heart where reposed her treasures.

With the two brothers on a divan, Duncan's arm still around the other's shoulders,

he began: 'Ruth came from Centerville here on a strange mission. There had been some business trouble between her father and ours. I could never get her to tell me the particulars or be definite about it, but she felt that her father was deeply wronged. She knew she was an attractive girl, educated and well-bred, and she conceived the idea of coming here, vamping Colin or me, getting one of us in her power and thus avenging her father. She won the position easily, but her plans went awry, for she fell in love with me.' Duncan's smile flashed, the smile of a happy man, and Colin listened, dazed.

'Why one human being has charm for another has never been fully understood, but Ruth had been here but a few weeks before I knew that, servant or princess, she was the one girl for me. A month ago we were married. We had a room in Jennings Street and Ruth had never come to my room here when I was at home until Sunday night.' Duncan gave the shoulders he was embracing a remorseful squeeze. 'Colin, old chap, I'm sorry, sorry as the deuce. She had found a

wire in her room when she came home that night, bringing news that her father was in trouble, and she said she might have to go to him.'

'Then what,' asked Colin — and Tobey had been eagerly waiting to hear the question — 'what made her behave so strangely at the inquest?'

'I don't know,' replied Duncan thoughtfully. 'Nothing that she told me Sunday night seemed to lead up to it, and I had no opportunity to speak to her afterward.'

'Then you don't think — you are sure— she had reasons for wanting Father out of the way —'

'Yes, old boy. She tried sometimes to persuade me to announce our marriage. She didn't dread my being disinherited so much as I did. Ruth is a strong — fine — well, this is no time to try to convince you that I have a treasure of a wife.'

'So you haven't any fear that — that she harmed Father?'

'No, no more fear than I have that you did. Oh, Colin, I'm glad this came out.' As

Duncan uttered the fervent words he looked across at Tobey. 'Do you know you've plumb scared the family and the family's hummingbird into fits, by your mysterious behavior?'

'There is never anything mysterious about me,' said Colin naïvely, still bewildered; 'I'm just frankly a chump all the time.'

'Dearest boy,' said Mrs. Battle, 'shall you have to tell all this Thursday? I suppose you will.'

'Perhaps not,' remarked Tobey. They all looked at her. 'You have a very busy detective working for you now. This is my first criminal case, and I have a marvelous certainty that it will be my last, so I want to finish it up with a flourish of trumpets.'

Colin lifted the head that had been leaning on his hands, and found the little speaking face whose eyes were always sending him messages of comfort and absolute trust. A girl who knew music.

'I came this afternoon to ask Mrs. Battle a question. Do you remember telling me that you had known only one person who was as fond of sweet peas as you were?'

'Yes, yes, I do remember.'

'Who was it?'

'A Miss Valentine, of Centerville. Why, the name is the same as Ruth's. I never thought of it.'

'Thank you.' Tobey rose. 'Now I'll run away, and, I hope, detect.' She smiled on the others, the men rising, one with such a weight lifted off his pride and heart that he was able to perceive as never before what a very charming detective they employed.

'Show me once more where the clay tracks were in this room that were not brought in by you.'

Colin led her to the corner where one might have stood concealed from the library.

'You can see them faintly still,' said Mrs. Battle, joining them. 'I would not allow them to be touched.'

'Yes,' said Tobey. 'When Colin left at nine-thirty that night, some one might have seen him go and have come in and waited here behind these hangings.'

'Dear child, you're not thinking of that

poor flower-lover, whoever she was. No woman struck my poor brother.'

'Then perhaps a man stood there,' said Tobey, and she smiled at Colin, for the first time feeling the air clear enough for a response.

It came. He gazed at her and took her willing hand. 'You are wonderful,' he said with the quiet relaxation of a convalescent. 'I shouldn't wonder if you found the man before Thursday.'

'That's what I'm hoping to do,' she said confidently, and she gave the convalescent's hand a little pressure.

Mrs. Battle looked on and saw their interchanged look.

'Two nieces at a blow,' she thought resignedly.

Tobey, her little sandals fleet, flew home. Anthracite saw her coming and opened the screen door with one hand while he still held both newspapers in the other.

'Now, I'll tell you what I think, Miss Tobey,' he began excitedly.

'No, you won't, not now!' she cried. 'I'm too busy with what *I* think!' She ran upstairs to her room, closed the door, and sat down before her desk, taking from a drawer the telegram Cousin Ann Sally had so carefully pieced together. She read it over with new eyes.

'At large. Be on the watch. D. A.'

From the absurd supposition that Douglas Adair had wired the maid she had shifted to the certainty that the initials were Duncan Adair's. Now, that 'D. A.' meant a great light.

Starting up from the desk, Tobey ran downstairs to the telephone and called the office of the *Telegram*. Getting the city editor, 'It's Tobey, Uncle Bob. I've been working on the case and I've found something.'

'You mean because the maid has skipped? Gaynes says that doesn't mean anything.'

'I don't think many people would agree with him, but that isn't it. It's something else; and I want to see you. It's important.'

'Oh, important, is it?' Tobey was nearly certain she heard Mr. Bennett repressing a laugh. 'When do you want to see me?'

'Very soon. I just wanted to make sure that you wouldn't leave the office until I came.'

'Very well, Rebecca Tobias. Behold me in the rôle of Casabianca. It isn't a burning deck this time, but the office is pretty tepid; I'm thinking about the bathtub.'

'Well, take your mind off it, Uncle Bob. I'll be there very soon.'

Hanging up, she ran back to her room, and to that 'D. A.' which had driven Ruth to her lover's room, but without telling him more than that her father was in trouble.

David Ayres had warned his child that her poor, distracted mother had escaped. Probably all the rest of that night before the inquest, Ruth had suffered in apprehension of what might happen to the dear, wandering one. When in her nervous, harassed state she was confronted with that stained handkerchief and her mother's initials, what wonder that the blow staggered her with fear!

Tobey's own excitement was growing. The woman of the sweet peas had had her interview in her hand with the picture of Douglas Adair. Mechanically the girl opened her purse and pulled out her handkerchief to wipe her heated face, and a scrap of paper flew out with it. It was the criminal report which she had torn out before giving Anthracite the paper. She picked it up and read it. Her face colored deeper as she scanned the paragraph.

Suddenly she rose, seized her hat, and ran downstairs. 'I want a cab, Anthracite.'

Together they hurried to the street and the boy's shrill whistle was heard. A Yellow came hurrying up the drive.

'Miss Tobey, you ter'ble tired,' said the boy. 'I wish yo' wouldn't git all wo' out befo' the inquest to-morrow.'

'I think it will be a very short one next time,' she said, and jumped into the cab.

Mr. Bennett was in his shirt-sleeves when she finally burst into his office, closed the door, and leaned against it. He looked up from his desk and gazed curiously at her.

'You look as if you might have him on the leash outside there,' he said.

'I think I have him, Uncle Bob, but my knees are just wobbling.'

'Sit down then, girlie,' said the editor kindly, 'and tell me what's on your mind.' He noted that in spite of the heat Tobey was pale with excitement.

She obeyed him by sinking into a chair.

'Perhaps it's because I knew so little of sleuthing, Uncle Bob, but I've never been able to get away entirely from that woman of the sweet peas. I figured just how and when she could have got into the house that evening. They all said that the blow must have been stronger than a woman was able to give — unless she was abnormal; also, I couldn't see any motive. Did you know Mr. Adair was accused of stealing an invention from another man?'

'I've heard rumors of it.'

'Well, I found out who the man was. I suppose the papers haven't had proof enough to talk, and didn't want to get into any libel suits; but I found out who the man was, and

the fact that his wife lost her mind through brooding over their loss. She was in an asylum; and that, to me, was proof of the wrong.'

The editor was listening attentively. 'Your story to-day looked to me as if you were convinced of something else; as if you were determined to put the maid, Ruth Valentine, in the electric chair.'

Tobey colored. 'I felt I must do something against Jim Gaynes. He was doing all he could to condemn Colin Adair. I wouldn't read his story, for I knew what he would do.'

Mr. Bennett shook his head. 'Looks pretty bad for that young fellow.'

'Never fear,' said Tobey, clasping her hands and looking up as if she saw a vision of angels. The editor blinked as he regarded her. She met his eyes again. 'Ruth did behave as if she were at the last gasp of guilt, but it was because that handkerchief had her mother's initials, and the evening before she received a wire from her father, who was Mr. Adair's victim, saying that her mother had escaped from the asylum.'

'Her father Adair's victim, eh?'

'Yes, David Ayres is his name, but the initials on the handkerchief were of her mother's maiden name, and that was enough to stampede her under the circumstances; the name she adopted while in the Adair household. Of course, it looked to everybody as if she recognized her own handkerchief — to everybody but me, that is. I knew it wasn't hers.'

'How did you know it?'

'Because it was mine.'

'How did it happen to be there so convenient for the murderer?'

'Colin Adair had it.'

Again young blood was dancing in the face the reporter-detective was endeavoring to make professional.

'Humph, that was a nice thing for him,' remarked Mr. Bennett, wondering if he had been looking after his protégée with sufficient care.

Again Tobey apparently saw a vision of angels.

'You see, my mother's cousin, Miss Sally,

had been visiting me just at this time, and she found the torn telegram to Ruth in the incinerator, so I kept that dark, for I thought then that the signature "D. A." meant Duncan Adair, and I had to find out what the message meant.'

Mr. Bennett raised his eyebrows. 'They tell me,' he remarked, 'that Duncan Adair is the maid's lover.'

'He is,' said Tobey quickly, 'and he's her husband, too.'

'What!' The editor's exclamation was amazed. 'That's not generally known.'

'No, but I know it,' said Tobey demurely.

'Look here, my dear. It looks as if I'd been entertaining a wizard unawares.'

'Yes, and an angel, too. I'm not through. Read this. I took it from to-day's *Telegram*.'

Mr. Bennett accepted the clipping and read the heading:

A STRANGE SUICIDE

Police Patrol John Wilkins was attracted early this morning by the peculiar actions of a middle-aged woman on the Ford Street Bridge. She

carried a bunch of flowers wrapped in a newspaper which she smelled frequently and to which she seemed to be talking. She advanced to the middle of the bridge, laid the flowers down, and with an agility and ease that surprised the few spectators at hand had thrown herself into the water before she could be caught. The unidentified body was recovered and taken to the morgue.

Mr. Bennett looked up when he had finished.

'And you think —'

Tobey rose. 'Come, put on your coat. Uncle Bob. We're going.'

'Where?'

'To the morgue,' said Tobey, 'and I hope Mr. Gaynes isn't anywhere around.'

Mr. Bennett smiled as he put on his coat. 'Poor Jim,' he remarked; 'that is, if you're right, poor Jim.'

'I shall never trouble him again,' said Tobey quietly. 'Me for fashions, etiquette, and the household after this.'

'Is that so?' inquired the editor. 'Why this change of heart?'

'Because it has come near to being broken. I want to keep it intact.'

'In order to give it away?' Again her friend looked at her curiously.

Tobey shrugged her pretty shoulders. 'I could tell you something about that, but I won't. We have other business.'

As they neared the morgue, they saw a man and woman leaving it. The woman was crying. Her face was covered, but Tobey believed she recognized Ruth. They waited until the couple had moved down the street, then entered and made inquiry of the man in charge as to the woman who committed suicide in the river that morning. He said that the body had just been identified as that of Mrs. David Ayres, of Centerville.

A thrill passed through Tobey. 'Were the flowers she laid on the bridge saved?' she asked.

The man produced them, the torn bit of newspaper still around them. Tobey looked up at her companion, her eyes beaming through tears. The flowers were withered sweet peas. She opened her purse and took from it the piece of paper she had picked up beneath the torn vines. It matched the piece

around the flowers, and there looked up at them the jaggedly torn face of Douglas Adair.

Mr. Bennett kept silence. He would not interfere in Tobey's case. She gave back the flowers and their wrapping to the keeper.

'Please do not allow the body to be moved until I have seen the police,' she said to the curious man, who was watching these movements closely. 'We are working for the solution of a case.'

'Of course,' she said to her companion as they went out, 'the finger-prints will be the answer.'

'Where are you taking me now?' inquired Mr. Bennett.

'To police headquarters. We must get a taxi.'

'Might I humbly suggest that we 'phone first, and let them know that distinguished company is arriving with news?'

This they did, being fortunate enough to detain the inspector on the Adair case, just as he was going out.

Mr. Bennett, half amused and wholly proud, introduced Tobey at headquarters,

and the chief of police and the inspector together listened to the repetition of her tale. The chief ordered finger-prints taken at once of the dead woman. He congratulated Tobey heartily and promised that no one except Mr. Bennett should get the news, so the *Telegram* should have a scoop.

CHAPTER XIII

TOBEY'S TRIUMPH

It was twilight on that last evening of June, when newsboys were calling the Extra which carried Tobey's triumphant story.

Before it came from the press, she called up the Adair house. Mr. Wentworth answered the telephone.

'This is Tobey Vincent,' she said in a quavering voice. 'What are you all doing this evening?'

'Sitting on the veranda, watching the fountain, and smelling the flowers and wishing the humming-bird was hovering over them.'

'Mr. Wentworth, I can hardly talk, I am so excited. I've had to write so fast. An extra is just coming out —'

'What about — what about —'

'The criminal. I've found the criminal. You know I told you I wasn't a humming-bird, but a hawk with her foot on the prey.

I didn't want any of you to see the paper till I've seen you.'

'Where are you? I'm coming for you.'

'No. I'm at the office. Promise to wait for me. Promise not to buy a paper. I will get a taxi and be with you soon.' The speaker hung up, and Alec Wentworth, mopping his brow with his handkerchief, went into the library and out to the silent group looking desolately before them and thinking of the morrow.

'It was Miss Vincent,' he announced impressively. 'Rebecca Tobias Vincent, *alias* humming-bird.'

Mrs. Battle looked up forlornly. 'Something about the inquest? Too bad for a young girl —'

Alec Wentworth shook his head and dropped into his chair. 'No,' he said simply, 'there isn't going to be any inquest.'

Duncan and Colin looked up quickly. 'What do you mean, Uncle Alec?'

Colin started to his feet. 'I am going to get her.'

'It wouldn't surprise me at all if you did,'

said Mr. Wentworth quietly, 'but sit still, she's coming here; and if you ask me, I think she's the most ensnaring combination of cleverness and sweetness I ever knew in my life. I think I hear an Extra calling. We're not to buy one.'

'Not?' cried Colin. 'This is no time to be mysterious, Uncle Alec. Speak out.'

'You seemed to think yesterday that mystery was all right. I don't know anything to tell you.' Alec Wentworth spread out his hands. 'I'm only guessing that there won't be any inquest.'

'Then she told you —' Colin spoke excitedly.

'She's found him!' ejaculated Duncan.

'We're to wait till she comes and not buy a paper. That's all I have that's definite.'

They sat there in the gathering dusk, pale, excited faces and questioning eyes, grouped close together, waiting.

'Uxtry! Uxtry!' The boys' cries could now be heard from different directions, mingling with the honking of the motors.

Alec Wentworth, straining his ears, thought

he heard a car stop before the house. He started up, then sank back in his chair.

'She was coming in a taxi. I think that's it now. You go, Colin.'

The young fellow ran through the library and gained the door just as Tobey was paying the cabman. He ran down the steps, and, as she turned her radiant face to him, he seized both her hands and held them while they went up the steps. As soon as they were inside the screen door she was in his arms, held breathlessly tight.

'Uxtry! Uxtry!' came the cry up the street.

'Dear, wonderful Tobey, what is it?'

'Poor Duncan, I'm sorry.'

'Then it's Ruth? It'll wreck him.'

'No, no, but it is Ruth's mother. I couldn't bear to have him read it in the paper unprepared.'

'But it wasn't a woman.' The blood was beating in Colin's temples, his heart thumping close to Tobey's.

'Yes, a woman, but insane, and that is why—'

'I mustn't keep you! They're all waiting for a way out of this hell.'

So Tobey, her eyes still fresh from the vision of angels, walked back through the French window with Colin. The others were standing awaiting her.

'My little girl,' said Mrs. Battle faintly, 'sit down and tell us.'

Tobey took the place in their midst and met Duncan's dark, intense inquiry.

'It will sadden you, Mr. Adair,' she said, her eyes very gentle, 'because it is Ruth's sorrow. Did you know her mother was insane?'

'No.'

'She became so from brooding over her husband's business troubles, and, Mrs. Battle, this poor lady was once the Ruth Valentine who loved sweet peas. She escaped from the asylum and came to your garden Sunday night.'

'David Ayres's wife!' exclaimed Mrs. Battle, horror in her voice.

'Ruth's telegram that night was from her father telling her of her mother's escape.

After a sleepless night the sight of the handkerchief with her mother's initials caused Ruth's collapse, but it was my own handkerchief that Colin had accidentally taken and put in with his music at Uncle Bob's musicale.'

'Can it be? That poor woman!' Mrs. Battle spoke desperately.

'Yes; she entered the library after Colin left and hid in the corner of the drawing-room; and — and her insane excitement gave her the strength —'

'But how could you know this?'

'This morning the poor, wandering lady threw herself into the river and left her sweet peas, in their wrapping, on the bridge. I had saved the other half of her paper that I picked up under the vines, and it matched, and I had found Ruth's telegram. The body was recovered and the finger-prints gave the solution.'

'Nemesis,' murmured Mrs. Battle. 'My poor brother.' She pressed a handkerchief to her eyes.

Duncan started up. 'I must go to Ruth.'

'She and her father are in town,' said Tobey. 'I saw them to-day.'

'Uxtry! Uxtry!' The cry kept coming over the warm summer air.

'They know,' went on Tobey, 'and I have had to tell the whole story for the paper. I'm glad it's over.' The girl looked piteously at Alec Wentworth. She seemed to feel he had the greatest understanding.

'You must hear this, boys,' said Mrs. Battle impressively. 'It was my duty to live with my poor brother and bring up his children, and I thought as little as possible about the assertion that he had wronged David Ayres about his invention, but it has been in the back of my mind always, and I long for amends to be made. Poor Ruth Valentine has gone, but you, Duncan, have married her daughter, and, of course, if David Ayres has any financial troubles, they are over.'

'I understand now why Ruth was never frank with me,' said Duncan. 'I wish I had had Colin's nerve and declared my marriage to Father. Then the truth would all have come out, but I should have been disinherited,

and couldn't have done for them what *I* shall now.' He put his hand on his brother's shoulder. 'The idea of Colin's being cut off is absurd,' he added. 'My sister and I won't have any such nonsense.'

'I have the will right here,' said Alec Wentworth, and he drew from an inside pocket a folded paper and opened it.

The document began with the usual preamble and then came the bequests.

'To Colin Adair I leave the sum of one dollar. To my sister, Emily Battle, I leave fifty thousand dollars. I desire after that that my property, real and personal, shall be divided equally between my children.'

Colin was frowning lightly, his eyes resting on the dusky garden, beginning to get the rays of the rising moon, and for a moment the fountain alone broke the silence.

Mrs. Battle regarded her darling boy tenderly.

Then Tobey spoke. The reporter-detective's voice sounded deprecating, childlike. 'That sounds to me,' she said, 'as if Colin was left one dollar more than the others.'

Mr. Wentworth smiled toward her — then he laughed.

'Humming-bird, you're exactly right. I was wondering who would see it first. So much for a home-made will manufactured in a rage. Colin, you owe Rebecca Tobias Vincent a fortune. Her sleuthing is still functioning.'

Colin met the girl's eyes and they fell before his.

'Come down into the garden, Tobey,' he said; 'if we have business to talk over, we'd better be alone.'

She leaned her hands in Mrs. Battle's lap.

'Duncan told us this afternoon that Ruth came here intending to marry one of them,' she said.

'Yes, my child,' Mrs. Battle smiled gently as she patted the hands; and as Tobey didn't speak or move, but still appealed to her silently, she laughed a little. 'What has that to do with you, dear? Have you any conscientious scruples?'

'No. I didn't take the case for that,' replied Tobey, so naïvely that a ripple of

laughter moved them all; 'but before Colin knew who I was — I —' she hesitated.

'I don't wonder, my dear,' said Mrs. Battle. 'I'm the last person to wonder.'

'You see,' Tobey spoke very fast, 'I don't want to go down into the garden with him unless I'm sure that you would — would be willing he should talk business with me.'

The girl was scarlet to the hair, but she had been in his arms and had felt his heart beat and she was in desperate earnest. Without Mrs. Battle's approval, she could not go on.

Aunt Em kissed the sweet face soundly. 'My dear, I can't possibly imagine what the Adair family would do without you,' she said, and Alec Wentworth uttered a sonorous 'Amen.'

So Colin, a man in a dream, led her down into the garden and Duncan kissed his aunt's forehead.

'I must go to Ruth. She asked me not to come until she sent for me, but I must take the lead now, and I must talk with her father.'

'You are not forgetting the service tomorrow morning in all this excitement and your anxiety for Ruth?'

'No, dear Aunt Em' — Duncan took her hand — 'I will be here and attend to it all, and after that I shall take Ruth away to rest and forget. Colin will have charge of the business until I return. My poor little Ruth. The nine days' wonder! She'll suffer!'

'Yes, I know. Tell her I love her; and tell David Ayres that I insist that he shall be my guest for August at the seashore.'

Duncan left, and Mrs. Battle and Alec Wentworth talked in low tones of the sad closing of one chapter of life; while the opening chapter of those in the garden unfolded, and the night closed in.

The falling drops of the fountain began to catch the light of the rising moon, and Colin Adair, half dazed in his revulsion of feeling, sat on the marble bench with the ineffably happy girl in his arms.

'Are you real, Tobey? That's what I'd like to be sure of,' he said. 'I've had so many jolts in twenty-four hours, all nightmares, that I

somehow distrust this dream. Shall I wake up and find my arms empty?'

An extra clinging of hands protested.

'Why should a girl, the sweetest, the cleverest, find me a derelict and not believe in it. Not a bit of my spirit but was sore from blows, and now — this. Why, it's a marvelous world! Am I awake?' He bowed his head and the response that met him from Tobey's lips was proof positive.

Her hand went up to his cheek. 'Only one little disappointment.'

'Can't it be fixed?'

'I don't believe so. It's only that ever since this morning, when I found that you were going to be poor, I've been dreaming of our living in a garret where you would write music and I should earn our living with my pen.'

'You would live with me in a garret, Tobey?'

'I'd live with you in a dungeon! Think of living with you at all! It's a dream! A dream I've been dreaming for a year.'

'Why, Tobey! Tobey, my love, I'm not worth it. I'm a chump.'

'You're a genius!'

Colin smiled. 'Is that why you think the music I would write in our attic wouldn't sell, and you would have to do all the supporting?'

'Yes; a lot of it will be over people's heads, I fear. Ever since you told me how the modern things are luring you, I've seen that you are going that way.' Tobey sighed. 'All right, since you can afford it.'

'What it is,' mused Colin devoutly, 'to have a sweetheart who knows Richard Strauss from Johann!'

Tobey stirred in his arms. 'But I don't want my sweetheart to write "Till Eulenspiegels."'

Colin laughed. 'I'll try to restrain myself from eclipsing Herr Strauss.'

'You know,' she declared gravely, 'people still do prefer melody and harmony to discord and dissonance, no matter what they try and strain after from a sense of duty.'

'Melody and harmony,' repeated Colin musingly. He rested his cheek on the soft waves of the bobbed head on his breast.

Brilliant drops splashed in the marble ba-

sin for minutes before he spoke again. Peace, such peace in the garden.

'What further ambition remains for a man who has been lifted from the flames into heaven?' he uttered at last.

Tobey's sigh was profound.

THE END

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